THE WORKS OF LOUIS DE BLOIS

COMMONLY CALLED LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS

V—THE SANCTUARY OF THE FAITHFUL SOUL—PART II

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THE SANCTUARY OF THE FAITHFUL SOUL

(CONCLAVE ANIMAE FIDELIS)

PART II.—MONILE SPIRITUALE
A STRING OF SPIRITUAL JEWELS

By LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS

In an Anonymous Translation

Revised and Edited by
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INTRODUCTION

THE Sanctuary of the Faithful Soul (*Conclave animae fidelis*), written by Blosius somewhere about 1558, consists of four separate works: *Speculum Spirituale* (*A Spiritual Mirror*), already published as Volume IV in this series; *Monile Spirituale* (*A String of Spiritual Jewels*); *Corona Spiritualis* (*A Spiritual Crown*); *Scrinolinium Spirituale* (*A Spiritual Casket*).

The second of these, *A String of Spiritual Jewels*, is the book now being introduced. This translation first appeared in 1871, in *Spiritual Works of Louis of Blois*,* edited by Father John Edward Bowden, of the Oratory of St Philip Neri—a book which achieved a fourth edition in 1903. We have not been able to identify the translator, and we do not know whose work it is we have here and there thought fit to revise. The revision—slight enough, it must be admitted—has been made with an eye to the original Latin, and with an attempt to give a more

* *Spiritual Works of Louis of Blois* (R. Washbourne, London, 1871).

readable English rendering where the text seemed to cling too closely to the Latin word and idiom.

* * * * *

Blosius forestalls an objection that may readily arise with regard to a book such as this, which contains the accounts of private revelations and visions. He says that some there are who will reject and ridicule them as "the dreams of foolish women"; and the enquiring reader may well ask what sort of belief the Church would have us repose in these revelations alleged to have been received by certain favoured souls.

At the very outset we must grasp clearly the elementary distinction between Revelation and revelations. Revelation is God's direct speech to man—that lifting of the veil whereby he has made known, in an unwonted and supernatural manner, mysteries and truths for the profit of the whole Church. Such messages, "truths that have come down from heaven"—*veritates e caelo delapsae*—as they are called in Pope Pius X's Decree "Lamentabili," are contained in the Bible and in the *depositum* of the Apostolic tradition transmitted by the Church. Revelation ceased with the apostles.

It is now a sealed book which all must believe, to which no one may add a word. The private and particular revelations, such as we read of in this book, can add nothing to the closed book of Revelation. A modern writer has aptly said: "The things called revelations are but the new underlining of the old lines, new lights on old truths, new ways of setting out old proverbs, new lips singing old songs, new hearts quivering under new billows of the old joy and sorrow."* The Church, in giving them her sanction, only wishes us to know that they contain nothing contrary to faith and good morals, and that they may be read without danger or disedification. She does not disapprove of their being submitted to historical and scientific investigation by those who are competent for such research: they may be accepted or rejected, according as the human evidence supports or discredits them. The Church's approval of them by no means imposes upon the faithful the obligation of believing them as if they were part of the Catholic faith. They are revelations, not Revelation.

Pope Benedict XIV, speaking of the

* Father Vincent McNabb, O.P., *The Wayside : A Priest's Gleanings*, p. 17 (Burns Oates and Washbourne).

revelations of St Hildegard, St Bridget, and St Catherine of Siena, says: "It is not obligatory, nor even possible, to give them the assent of Catholic faith, but only of human faith, in conformity with the dictates of prudence, which presents them to us as probable and worthy of pious belief."* Faithful Catholics will accept them as they would accept any other provable historical facts, remembering that, as Blosius says, they have long ago been approved by pious and learned men. "During the lifetime of St Bridget," he says, "distinguished bishops and theologians examined her revelations, and after her death the Council of Basle deputed some, who were eminent for piety and learning, to investigate them most carefully; and all these constantly affirmed that they were from God." A thoroughgoing scepticism, which would dismiss them without examination as absurd and impossible, would be as rash as the extravagant credulity that would erect them into articles of faith.

A docile child of the Church will not dismiss lightly the words of the saints whom the Church, by her solemn and deliberate act of canonization, has declared to be God's special friends, who have lived

* *De Canonizatione* III, liii 15.

the Christian life in heroic completeness. The Church, by raising them to her altars, has set them up as perfect Christians, worthy of our dutiful respect and humble imitation. In the process of canonization, all their recorded words, visions, miracles, and revelations are severely scrutinized, and a full hearing is given to all that can be urged from what may be called the sceptical point of view. In no human tribunal is there any parallel to the searching test that must be passed before a saint's life is declared to be heroic in holiness. We should be rash, therefore, to set ourselves up without authority as judges of what the Church has so thoroughly sifted.

With regard to revelations and divine locutions vouchsafed to the saints, the following words of the Abbé Saudreau—in the Preface to his book, *Les Paroles Divines*—may prove helpful: "Let us remember that the saints, independently of the words they hear or believe that they hear, certainly receive great and precious illuminations from God by means of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. When they speak, and when they unfold their thoughts, the light shed upon them by God gives much more authority to their words, making them, as it were, an echo of the Holy Ghost, even if they do not

actually record the very words that have come from the mouth of God. Even if they are deceived in believing their own thoughts inspired, still these thoughts are the fruit of their reflections and of the illuminations of grace."

BERNARD DELANY, O.P.

Blackfriars,
Oxford.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE reader must be warned not to follow the wayward judgement of some men, who despise divine revelations and visions as vain dreams, and thereby show themselves to be unspiritual and wanting in humility. For we should not esteem of little account the revelations that have been divinely manifested, by which the Church of God is wonderfully enlightened. It is certain that the holy Prophets—into whom the Spirit of God descended like a most sweet torrent—learnt the truth without error by revelation. And the blessed Paul, commending to the Galatians the Gospel which he preached, asserts that he received it, *not of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*.* Lastly, the Holy Scriptures are full of divine revelations, and the Lord ever was and ever will be able to work whatsoever he willeth in the pure souls of his elect. Let, therefore, the pious reader receive with a humble and grateful mind the holy revelations here related, for thus will he derive from them immense fruit and consolation.

* Gal. i 12.

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21. Ponder, therefore, the mercy of God. Yet defer not conversion through hope in his mercy.

1. THE divine Dionysius the Areopagite, in the Epistle which he wrote to Demophilus, pointing out how great is the goodness and kindness of God towards sinners, and how much our good Lord desires their salvation, relates a beautiful vision shown to St Carpus, a bishop to whom many things were divinely revealed, which was narrated to him by Carpus himself. A certain infidel having led away a Christian from the faith of the Church, Carpus, who ought to have had compassion on them both, and to have prayed for them, conceived an excessive anger and bitterness against both of them. Wherefore he prayed to God to end their

lives at once; not being able to endure that impious men, who perverted the right ways of the Lord, should be allowed to live. And, behold, looking up, he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus sitting on a throne, with innumerable angels standing round him. But, when he turned his eyes downwards, he beheld a deep abyss, in which were a multitude of serpents. At the mouth of this abyss, as it were on the slippery edge, stood the two men, on whom he had wished to bring evil, trembling and exceedingly miserable. And, when he was angry that they were not instantly swallowed up, looking up again to heaven, he saw the most merciful Jesus, moved with pity, arise from his heavenly seat, and descending, stretch forth to them his most kind hand, the angels at the same time assisting them. Then the Lord Jesus, turning to Carpus, said: "I am ready to suffer again for the salvation of these men; and it would be pleasing to me, provided other men would not therefrom take occasion to sin. Consider whether it would be well for thee to prefer that dwelling full of serpents to the company of God and his good and merciful angels."

The blessed Dionysius adds these words: "These are the things which I heard, and I believe them to be true."

2. Gertrude, or Trutha, a holy virgin most dear to God, was once divinely taught that one who is considering in his heart the image of the Crucified, ought to think he hears Jesus Christ himself saying to him, with a gentle voice, "Behold, thou seest how for love of thee I hung upon the cross, naked, despised, my whole Body wounded, and every limb stretched. And my heart is still full of such sweetness of love towards thee, that, if it were necessary for thy salvation, and thou couldst not otherwise attain to eternal bliss, I would suffer for thee alone all that I suffered for the whole world."

3. St Bridget in spirit heard Christ speak thus: "I am perfect love, for all things which I have done from eternity, I did out of love; and, whatsoever I do or shall do in future, likewise proceeds and will proceed from my love. My love for man is now as great and incomprehensible as it was at the time of my passion, when, out of exceeding love, I delivered all the elect by my death. And, if it were possible for me to die as many times as there are souls in hell, I would with most prompt will and most perfect charity give up my Body, and would endure for each soul the same passion and death that I endured for all."

Thus spoke Christ. Behold how tenderly

and ardently God loves the rational soul, and how vehemently he desires that every man should attain to heavenly bliss. But the Lord created man noble, to his own image and likeness, giving him reason and liberty of choice, and freedom of will, so that, if he chose to obey and serve God, he might receive an eternal reward in heaven; but, if he would not, he should undergo never-ending punishment in hell. This is justice.

If, however, any one who has scorned and disobeyed God by sin, should, out of love, return to God by true repentance, he shall be accepted by God, and shall not perish, however many and grievous may have been his sins, provided he perseveres in well-doing. This is mercy.

4. Once, when the holy virgin Gertrude was considering within herself which of those things that she had learnt from the Lord it would be most useful to make known to men, the Lord thus answered her thoughts: "It would be most useful that men should know and ever bear in mind, that I, the Son of the Virgin, stand before God the Father, for their salvation; and, whenever they sin in their hearts through human frailty, I offer my spotless Heart to God the Father to make amends for them; and, when they offend by deeds, I show him my pierced

hands; and thus, in whatsoever way they sin, I appease the Father by my innocence, in such wise, that being penitent, they may ever obtain a ready pardon of their sins."

5. The holy virgin Mechtild was praying for a certain man, and she was indignant because he remained incorrigible. The Lord said to her: "Condole with me, O my chosen one, and pray for the miserable sinners, whom I bought at so great a price, and for whom I wait so patiently, desiring earnestly that they should be converted to me. Behold, as I once offered myself a sacrifice on the altar of the cross, so do I now, with the same love, stand before God the Father, on behalf of sinners; because it is my greatest desire that the sinner should turn to me by true repentance, and live."

6. Again, the Lord said to the same holy virgin Mechtild, concerning another pious person: "When he has committed any fault from human infirmity, if he presently returns to me by penance, trusting in my mercy, I am ready, for one sigh, to remit his every fault."

7. St Gertrude once understood from the Lord, that if anyone, quickly repenting of all his sins of omission and commission, gives himself with his whole heart to obey the precepts of God, he is as truly sanctified

and cleansed before God as was that leper who said, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,* and to whom the Lord answered, *I will. Be thou made clean.**

8. Jesus Christ said to St Bridget: "Be steadfast and humble. Be not elated in thine own mind, when I make known to thee the dangers of others, and divulge not their names, unless thou be commanded to do so. For I do this not to their confusion, but that they may be converted, and acknowledge the justice and mercy of God. Nor shouldst thou fly from them, as if they were already judged and condemned; because, if he who is now most wicked should call upon me with contrition, and with the will to amend, I am ready at once to pardon him. And, on account of his true contrition, I call him to-day most dear whom yesterday I called most wicked; and, if his contrition be perfect and steadfast, I remit not only the sin, but also the punishment due to it."

9. Our Lord said to St Mechtild: "There is no sinner too wicked to receive my forgiveness. If he truly repent, I will instantly grant him full remission of all his sins, and rest my Heart upon him with as much clemency and sweetness as if he had never sinned." O unspeakable goodness of God!

* Luke v 12, 13.

Wherefore—as one of the saints writes—if anyone should deny that God is ready to remit the sins of the truly penitent, even as often as there are moments in time, he would set about despoiling God of great glory.

10. Again, our Lord said to the same virgin Mechtild: "Although the stars—that is, the souls of my elect—may sometimes be greatly darkened by the clouds of sin, and the night of ignorance, yet they cannot be obscured in their firmament—that is, in my divine light. Though my elect, I say, may often be involved in great sins, yet I always regard them with the same love by which I chose them, and I wait for them in that glory to which they will at length attain. It is, therefore, good for man to reflect often with what freely-given goodness I have chosen him, and how I have thought mercifully of him, and lovingly regarded him, even while he lay in his sins; and, also, with what kindness I have rendered him good for evil." Oh, the depth of the inscrutable wisdom and mercy of God, who endeavours in so many and such marvellous ways to recall and attract to himself the heart of the sinner, leaving him no ground for despair!

11. When the holy virgin Gertrude had heard in a sermon that no one could be

saved who had not at least so much true charity as to repent and abstain from sin for the love of God, she reflected within herself that many pass out of this life who seem to repent rather from fear of hell than from love of God. While she was turning over these things in her mind, our Lord answered her thus: "When I see those in their agony who have ever remembered me with affection, or have done any meritorious work, I show myself to them with so sweet and gentle an aspect, that they grieve from their inmost hearts for having ever offended me; and being by this repentance rendered capable of obtaining salvation, they cannot perish."

12. The blessed Mechtild was once considering how immense was the loving-kindness of God, when our Lord said to her: "Come, and contemplate the least of all the blessed who are in heaven; for in him thou wilt be able to understand my loving-kindness." And while Mechtild was considering attentively, and longing to know who it was of whom the Lord was speaking, behold there appeared to her a man of royal aspect and dignity, in the flower of his age, with a beautiful, resplendent, and most lovable countenance; to whom she said: "Who art thou? and how didst thou attain to so great happiness and glory?" He

answered: "On the earth I was a robber and a malefactor; but, because my evil deeds were done rather from ignorance and the habits in which I was trained by my parents, than out of wickedness, I at last through repentance obtained mercy. But I remained a hundred years in the place of punishment, and endured many torments, that I might be purified; and now, solely by the lavish goodness of God, I have been brought hither into rest." In this manner St Mechtild learned the loving-kindness of God towards him who was the least of all the blessed. And if our most merciful Lord granted so much to one who had led so bad a life, what will he give to those who live in justice and holiness?

13. God spoke thus to the holy virgin, St Catherine of Siena: "Those sinners who, in the extremity of death, despair of my mercy, offend me more deeply, and displease me more by that one sin, than by all the iniquities that they have ever committed. For he who despairs, openly despises my mercy, and perversely imagines his wickedness to be greater than my mercy and goodness. Whence, being held captive by this sin, he grieves not for his offence against me, but for his own irreparable damnation. But if he truly grieved for having offended and

scorned me, and faithfully hoped in my mercy, he would most certainly find it; since my mercy is infinitely greater than all the sins which ever were or ever can be committed by any creature."

14. It is not, however, sufficient to grieve for sins; it is also necessary to confess them sacramentally before a priest, unless this confession be really impossible. Hence, the Lord Jesus said to St Bridget: "No one is so great a sinner that I would refuse him mercy, if he sought it with a humble and perfect heart. Therefore, let sinners who wish to be reconciled to me, and to obtain my grace and friendship, first, grieve with their whole hearts that they have offended me, their Creator and Redeemer; then, let them purify themselves before the priest by a sincere and humble confession, and amend their lives, and perform satisfaction according to the advice and discretion of the priest. If they have done this, I will draw near to them, and the devil will be kept at a distance from them. Afterwards, it will be fitting that they should receive my Body with devotion and true love, resolving never more to fall into their former sins, and purposing to persevere to the end in well-doing. These I will run to meet as a mother runs to meet her erring children, and will most gladly

receive them. I will be in them, and they shall be in me, and shall live and rejoice with me to all eternity."

15. When St Bridget out of compassion was praying for a certain powerful nobleman of renown in the world, who was dangerously ill, and yet would not confess his sins to a priest after the manner of the faithful; Jesus Christ, appearing to her, said: "Tell thy confessor to visit that sick person, and to hear his confession." The priest, being sent by St Bridget, visited the sick man; but he answered that he had often made his confession, and that it was not now necessary. The following day, by the command of Christ, the priest was again sent to him, and received the same answer as before. But the third day, returning to the sick man, he declared to him the things which would hinder his being saved, which our Lord had revealed to St Bridget. Then he, dissolved in tears, said to the priest: "And how can I possibly obtain pardon, who am laden with so many crimes?" The priest replied: "Even if thou hadst perpetrated many more and worse crimes, thou mightest yet be saved by true contrition and confession; this I faithfully promise thee." And he answered: "I despaired of the salvation of my soul, because I had utterly submitted and given

myself up to the dominion of the devil, who has also frequently spoken to me. I am now sixty years old, and I have never made a sacramental confession, nor received the Body of Christ; but I now feel that I shed such tears as I never shed before." On that day, therefore, he confessed four times to the priest, and on the morrow after his confession he received the holy Eucharist, and on the sixth day he died. Concerning him the Lord said afterwards to St Bridget: "He went not down into hell, but reached purgatory, on account of his contrition and confession. He has obtained salvation through my goodness, whereby I wait even unto the last moment for the conversion of a sinner, and through the merits of my Mother, whose sorrows he used to compassionate while he lived in the flesh, and he will be saved."

16. God the Father said to the virgin St Catherine: "My goodness has granted to the glorious Mother of my only begotten Son, out of reverence for the Incarnate Word, that whoever has recourse to her with devout veneration, even though he be a sinner, shall in no wise become the prey of the infernal enemy. For she has been chosen and prepared by me, and placed as a most sweet inducement to captivate men, and especially the souls of sinners."

17. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, herself said to St Bridget: "However much a man may have sinned, if from the bottom of his heart he seeks me with true amendment and love, I am instantly ready to receive him. Nor do I consider how much he has sinned, but with what will and intention he returns to me. For I disdain not to touch, to anoint, and to heal the wounds of any sinner, let him be ever so vile and filthy; because I am called, and I truly am, the Mother of mercy."

18. St Gertrude once saw as it were little animals of various kinds running under the mantle of Mary, the most sweet Mother of God, by which were signified those sinners who have a special devotion to her. The Mother of mercy received them all with kindness, and, as it were, protecting them under her mantle, she patted and stroked each one with her delicate hand, and kindly caressed them, as one fondles a pet.

And she thus plainly showed how mercifully she receives all who call upon her, and with what maternal kindness she defends all who hope in her, even those who are still entangled in sin, until she reconciles them, as true penitents, with her Son.

19. The devil once wishing to deceive the holy virgin St Catherine, and to lead her into

faintheartedness or despair, endeavoured to persuade her that her life was false, useless, and wicked. She, therefore, taught by the goodness of God, who never denies himself to those who truly seek him, humbly raised her mind to the divine mercy, saying: "I openly confess to my Creator, that I have daily been in darkness, and done evil; but yet I will confidently hide myself in the Wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I will wash away the stains of all my iniquities in his precious Blood, and will evermore rejoice with holy desire in him my Creator and Redeemer." After these words the devil immediately fled.

20. Christ said to St Gertrude: "Anyone may attain to the hope of pardon, how much soever he may feel himself oppressed by the heavy weight of his sins, by offering to God the Father my most innocent passion and death. Let the sinner, therefore, believe that by this he obtains the saving fruit of pardon; because there is on earth no remedy against sin so efficacious as the devout remembrance of my passion, with right faith and true repentance."

21. But we should, in prudence, consider not only the mercy, but also the justice of God; concerning which Christ frequently spoke very terrible words to St Bridget.

She once, by the will of God, heard the devils bearing witness to the truth, and saying to the Lord: " If that creature whom thou lovest—namely, the Virgin who bore thee, and who never offended thee—had committed mortal sin, and had died without divine contrition, she would never have reached heaven, but would be tormented with us in hell; so greatly dost thou love justice."

Let no sinner, therefore, say to himself: I will now follow freely my own will and my pleasures, I will enjoy the delights and joys of this world, and afterwards I will amend at the end of my life; for the mercy of God is great and boundless; whenever I shall repent of my sins, the merciful Lord will receive me, and I shall be saved; meanwhile, I will do whatever pleases me. Let not the sinner speak thus, let him not act thus, let him not cast himself into danger; but let him without delay strive to amend his evil life, and if it be possible, confess his sins to a priest, and that sincerely and completely. For although God promises mercy to the penitent sinner, yet he promises not true repentance, nor a long life, to one who persists in sin. And it is certain that if a sinner who has offended God by his wickedness and crimes, should not repent and have true con-

trition before his soul is separated from the body, he will eternally perish, for the satisfaction of divine justice. O how many, seduced by the persuasions of the devil, perish and die in their iniquities! Wherefore it is sometimes said, in the Revelations of St Bridget, that souls fall into hell, as snow falls upon the earth.

CHAPTER II

OF THE DISCRETION AND PURITY OF INTENTION, WHICH A SPIRITUAL MAN OUGHT TO STRIVE AFTER IN EVERY ACTION

1. Prudence and moderation should be observed in all exercises of piety and mortification.
2. All the bodily members should be discreetly mortified, since through them all we have committed sins.
3. Continence and abstinence, however small, when offered to God, win an immense reward.
4. A right intention to seek God's pleasure in all our acts is the topmost step in the ladder of love.
5. The will to have the fervent desire of pleasing God is taken by God for the desire itself.
6. The great profit of frequent meditation on our Lord's passion.
7. The stigmata of Christ's wounds were imprinted on the hands and feet of Elizabeth of Spalbeeck.
8. An example to show that not only internal but also external works are pleasing to God.

1. THE illustrious virgin and martyr Agnes, appearing to St Bridget, said to her: "My daughter, be steadfast; and neither draw back, nor advance beyond what is fitting. Thou shouldst not afflict thyself beyond thy strength, nor imitate others in good works above thy nature; for God has decreed from all

eternity to open heaven to sinners by works of humility and love, and he wills that moderation and discretion be observed in all things. But the devil in his envy often persuades an imperfect man to fast beyond his strength, or to take up exercises that he cannot bear, or to aim at what is too high for him. The crafty enemy does this in order that the man, continuing only through shame what he foolishly undertook, may the more quickly fail through weakness. Thou shouldst measure thyself in this matter according to thy strength or thy weakness; because some are by nature stronger, and others weaker, some are more fervent by the grace of God, others more diligent by habit.

"Rule thyself, and order thy life, according to the advice of those who fear God. Desire not to seem what thou art not, nor seek anxiously what is above thy strength. There are some who believe they will obtain heaven entirely by their own merits; and some who think they can by their own works adequately satisfy for the sins they have committed. But these are damnable errors; for if a man were to give up his body to death a hundred times, he could not answer to God for one in a thousand." Thus spoke the blessed Agnes.

2. Christ said several times to St Bridget,

that satisfaction should be made by all our members, as they have all assented to sin. Let a man, therefore, with all diligence and humility correct himself, and neglect not to make all possible satisfaction to God (who, for a moderate penance rightly performed with good will here, remits grievous punishments in the next world), restraining, for the love of God, his eyes from beholding evil and vanity, his ears from hearing hurtful and foolish things, his tongue from evil and idle words, his heart from pernicious and foolish thoughts and wicked desires, and his whole body from all that soils the mind. Let him abstain not only from unlawful things, but also with prudence from some things that are lawful. Let him studiously mortify in himself his own will and his vices; let him patiently bear all adversity, and devote himself to good works, to virtue and holy exercises. Let him, however, always trust rather in the satisfaction and merits of Jesus Christ than in his own works and merits; for one little drop of the precious Blood of our Lord Jesus is of more value than all human merits.

3. Christ spoke thus to the blessed Bridget: "Abstinence and continence, however slight, discreetly undertaken, and observed for my love and honour, will deserve from me a great reward." And, assuredly, he who for

the love of God prudently restrains himself, so that he sees, hears, smells, tastes, speaks, and touches nothing that is not necessary or useful, and who discreetly strives to overcome his own will and sensuality even in the least things, does what is more pleasing to God than if he recalled many dead persons to life. Hence the Fathers say as follows: "If two men, passing the same way, find a beautiful flower, and one of them wishes, indeed, to gather it, but, thinking better of it, leaves it for God's sake; and the other, without reflection, gathers the flower; the latter, by gathering it in simplicity, sins not; but the former, by leaving the same flower for God's sake, gains as much merit over him who gathers it as there is distance between heaven and earth. If, however, he who gathers the flower gathers it purely to the praise of God, he also acquires great merit." In the same way, he who fittingly abstains from food for God's sake is greatly pleasing to God, and he who fittingly eats to the honour of God, is also pleasing to God.

4. The blessed Gertrude heard from our Lord that she showed her exceeding love of him when she offered in his praise all her thoughts, words, looks, and actions. She understood, also, that, as often as

anyone looks with devout intention on the image of Christ crucified, so often is he lovingly regarded by the most gracious mercy of God; and hence his soul, like a clear mirror, receives in itself from the divine love a most joyful image, which causes rejoicing in the whole court of heaven. And this will be to his eternal glory. She understood, also, that, if a person even lifts a straw from the ground, or takes one step for the honour and love of God, it is pleasing to God, and worthy of reward.

5. When the same virgin, St Gertrude, once complained that she could not feel as much desire of God as she ought, she was divinely taught that it was amply sufficient in the sight of God if a man willed to have a great desire, though he might feel little or no desire within himself; because he has before God as great a desire as he willeth to have, and God dwells in the heart containing such a desire (that is to say, the will to have the desire) more gladly than a man could dwell amid fresh and pleasant flowers.

6. Our Lord very often revealed to his most dear spouses, Gertrude, Bridget, Mechtild, and Catherine, how acceptable it is to him, and how profitable to man, to contemplate the passion of Christ with pious, humble, and sincere attention and devotion,

which they themselves were always most diligent in doing. For they engraved so deeply on their inmost hearts the passion of the Lord Jesus—which, though it was most bitter and cruel, is yet all full of the sweetness of love—and were accustomed to meditate upon it with such ardent and sweet affection, that it was to them honey to the taste, harmony to the ear, and joy to the heart.

7. The holy virgin Elizabeth of Spalbeeck also was accustomed daily to contemplate the passion of our Lord with immense devotion. Whence the stigmata of his five wounds were truly imprinted by Christ on her hands, feet, and side, so that blood often copiously flowed from them, as if from recent wounds, more especially on Fridays. And this most pure virgin was seven times a day so rapt in God that no feeling, movement, or breath were perceptible in her: for her whole body used to become rigid, and no part of it could be moved without moving the whole. Let us, in imitation of these virgins, engrave on our hearts the passion of the Lord Jesus, and sedulously give thanks for it.

8. Our Lord once instructed the blessed Gertrude by this simile: "Even as a powerful emperor not only is pleased to have in his palace gentle and accomplished maidens, but

also appoints and ordains princes, generals, and soldiers, and other ministers fitted for various labours, who may be ready always to attend to his affairs; so I also not only delight in the interior joys of those who, following my guidance, seek the quiet of divine contemplation, but I am, moreover, attracted to remain with the sons of men, when they undertake any useful work for my love and honour."

Therefore, pure and frequent prayer does, indeed, greatly adorn the soul of him who has leisure to pray continually, and who has the grace of prayer: (for what is more honourable than to converse assiduously with the heavenly King?) but, nevertheless, exterior works, rightly performed for God's sake, also confer great grace on the faithful soul.

CHAPTER III

OF PRAYER AND THE DIVINE OFFICE

1. Good will is a continual prayer.
2. All self-will should be abandoned when it is question of following the call of God.
3. The words of prayer should be uttered with actual attention.
4. Dryness and involuntary distractions do not lessen, but increase the merit of prayer.
5. Inconstancy of mind cannot altogether be got rid of in this life; but it should be discreetly dealt with.
6. The devil grievously attacks the prayerful.
7. It is good to commend ourselves to the prayers of others. The desire for prayer is sweet in God's eyes.
8. Short and fervent prayer is powerful with God.
9. Love, discretion, and confidence make up for deficiencies.
10. The canonical Hours should be united with the prayers which Christ poured out for us.
11. The prayer we should say after the canonical Hours.
12. The Heart of Jesus will supply what is lacking in our prayers when by his grace we have done our best.
13. The smallest works offered to God through Christ become great and noble.

1. Our Lord said to the virgin Catherine: "The holy desire of the soul—that is to say, good will—is a continual prayer, because it

has the power of prayer. And whatsoever man does for the love of God and of his neighbour, may be called prayer since love is accounted as prayer. Good will and pious affections should, however, at certain seasons and hours, be raised to me by actual devotion. Know, O daughter, that the soul that perseveres in humble and faithful prayer attains to all virtue. Wherefore, on no account is the duty of prayer to be neglected or omitted because of any difficulties, whether they proceed from the illusions of Satan, or from human frailty, or from unclean thoughts, or from inordinate carnal motions of the flesh. For the devil often strives more during the time of prayer than at other times to infest the soul with various images and phantoms. And he then cunningly suggests to him who prays, that such a prayer avails him nothing, since he ought to have no thoughts but of his prayer. The wicked enemy strives to persuade him of this, in order that he may incur weariness and confusion of mind, and so be led to omit the exercise of prayer, which is the strongest defence against all enemies. Oh! how useful to the soul, and how pleasing to me is that prayer which man makes with love, in the thought of his own vileness and of my goodness."

2. Again, our Lord said to St Catherine: "A man sometimes resolves to recite a certain number of Psalms, or other prayers, to which he is not obliged by duty or obedience; if, in the meantime, I should visit his soul, he abandons the grace of my visitation, that he may fulfil the number of prayers which he had intended in his own mind to say. But he ought not to do thus, nor to believe the devil who wishes to deceive him. Let him, therefore, when he feels himself specially visited by me, immediately follow my grace, and not impede it by the prayers which he had proposed to recite. He may, however, read them afterwards, if he has leisure; but if he cannot conveniently do this, let him not be in any way distressed, nor allow his mind to be disturbed. He obtains little fruit from prayer who looks only to the utterance of many words."

3. It was once shown in spirit to St Gertrude, that the words of prayer recited with attention of mind and holy devotion, are, as it were, brilliant jewels or most lovely flowers; but that the words of prayers said negligently, and, from habit, without earnest devotion, are like dull gems and faded flowers. And when the same virgin Gertrude had read a certain verse two hundred and twenty-five times, saluting Jesus, she understood

that each salutation was presented to the Lord in the likeness of the melodious sound of a musical instrument; but those salutations which she had read with devout attention gave out most sweet harmony, while those which she had read less accurately yielded lower and less joyful sounds.

4. Let him who prays take care lest his mind be distracted, voluntarily and by his own fault, through negligence; let him also beware of giving up prayer, because he may perhaps feel no consolation in it. As distractions which occur against the will of him who prays take not away the fruit and utility of the prayer, so neither does aridity of heart, so long as a good intention remains. Hence our Lord once said to St Gertrude: " I wish my elect to know that their good works and exercises are very pleasing to me, when they serve me at their own cost. And those do me service at their own cost, who, although they taste not the sweetness of devotion, yet faithfully go through their prayers and other pious exercises, trusting in my compassion, that I shall willingly and gladly receive them. There are many whose merit would be greatly diminished if sweetness and interior consolation were granted them, nor would it avail for their salvation."

5. Man sometimes labours under such

inconstancy of mind, that when he wishes to elevate his heart to God in prayer or meditation, or to fix it on any pious thought, he is presently driven away from it. This is treated of by St Augustine, saying: "Prayer is often impeded by vain thoughts, so that hardly has the heart fixed itself on God, desiring to remain so fixed, than it flies off as it were from itself, and cannot find a secure place in which to enclose itself, nor bars to restrain its flight and its wanderings. There is scarcely one persevering prayer among many. And God bears with the hearts of those who pray and admit various thoughts, not to say thoughts that are sometimes evil, perverse, and hostile to God. Wherefore, because his mercy is great, let us say to him: "Rejoice the heart of thy servant, because I have lifted up my heart unto thee, O Lord. And how have I lifted it up? As I was able, as thou hast given me strength." Thus speaketh St Augustine. Therefore, let not him who is of good will be unduly disquieted, because of the unsteadiness of his thoughts; but let him peacefully do what is in his power, so long as he humbly and patiently perseveres in prayer; for thus will he be most acceptable to God. Hence, the Lord taught the blessed Gertrude that when any one in prayer, meditation, or con-

templation, fixes his mind and his thoughts holily on God, he then presents to God a throne of glory, as it were a mirror of marvellous splendour, in which the Lord, the Giver of all good, beholds with delight his own image. And when man, from impediments and the instability of his heart, finds difficulty in doing this, the more earnestly and patiently he labours, the more fair and resplendent does that mirror appear in the sight of the adorable Trinity and of all the saints. But too great vehemence must be guarded against, lest the head should be injured, and the spirit disturbed.

6. When St Bridget was harassed by temptations in prayer, Mary the Mother of God said to her: "The devil with malicious watchfulness seeks to hinder the good from praying. But do thou, O daughter, whatever temptation may assail thee in prayer, persist in thy desire or good will, and in thy holy endeavours, as best thou canst; because thy pious desires and endeavours will be reputed as effectual prayer. Even if thou art not able to cast out the base and evil thoughts that come into thy mind, yet for those endeavours thou shalt receive a crown in heaven; thus these troubles will profit thee, provided thou consentest not to the temptation, but art displeased with whatever is unbecoming."

7. It was revealed by our Lord to St Gertrude, that when anyone commends himself to the prayers of another, trusting that by his merits he will obtain divine grace, the merciful Lord, without doubt, blesses him according to his faith and desire, even if he to whom he had commended himself should neglect to pray devoutly for him.

8. A certain very simple man, who scarcely knew how to read the Lord's prayer, asked holy counsel of St Bridget, and as St Bridget was praying for him, Christ said to her: "The simplicity of this man is more pleasing to me than the wisdom of the proud. Therefore, thou shalt instruct him to continue his work and his praiseworthy habits; and I will reward him. His good will is very acceptable to me. He has learnt from my Spirit the true wisdom, that is to say, the love of God, through which he keeps the law, and all the divine commandments. I say to thee, O daughter, whosoever with faith and a perfect will says these words—Jesus, have mercy on me—is more acceptable to me than one who reads a thousand verses without attention." The Lord likewise said to St Gertrude: "Although the souls in purgatory derive great profit from what is done for their relief by reciting the Office or Vespers of the Dead, and other prayers; yet a short

prayer uttered with burning love sometimes avails them more and obtains for them greater relief." But no one should, on account of these words of our Lord, omit the long prayers which he is under obligation to say, unless he is forced to do so by real necessity. For it is right always to prefer to other exercises those prayers to which we are bound by duty and obedience, and which can well be said.

9. Once also, when St Gertrude was confined to her bed by illness, and was unable to say her office, or even, according to her desire, to say the whole angelical salutation in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she yet endeavoured often to repeat at least these words: *Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.** Whereupon, the Virgin Mother of God appeared to her, clothed in a mantle marvellously adorned with golden flowers, which represented the salutations recited by her with difficulty; and in them shone forth brilliantly the pious affection with which she had desired to salute the glorious Virgin. There shone forth also the holy discretion with which she had recited those words only, when she felt herself unable to do more; and the entire confidence with which she trusted that the Mother of our

* Luke i 28.

Lord would graciously accept this her little service.

10. It was revealed to St Mechtild that he who has to recite the canonical Hours, will do it with great advantage if he unites his task of the Hours with the prayer of Christ. Therefore, when he is about to begin the Hours which he is obliged to recite, he may pray in this or in like manner, either in his heart or with his lips: "O Lord Jesus, I desire for thy honour humbly to obey, faithfully to serve thee, and purely to praise thee, in union with that most perfect attention with which thou didst praise and pray to thy Father on earth; help me by thy grace, for I can do nothing without thee." Thus his exercise will be wonderfully ennobled, and will be highly pleasing to God, for it will be reputed to be one with the prayer of Christ, as a little water mixed with wine is reckoned to be wine.

11. When the same virgin, Mechtild, was praying for a certain person who had complained to her that he often recited the canonical Hours thinking, through human infirmity, of other things, she received from our Lord this answer: "Let him for whom thou prayest, always say these words humbly after the Hours: *God be merciful to me a sinner.** For, if these words of the Publican

* Luke xviii 13.

availed him so much, that on account of them he was absolved from his sins and justified, why should they not also obtain pardon for any other? Since my mercy and clemency are not less ready to forgive now than they were then." Happy, indeed, is he who carefully fulfils his task of the Hours both by willing and humble obedience, and by reciting all the sacred words; for he is not voluntarily distracted, though he may suffer distraction of heart.

12. St Gertrude was once saying the divine Office with the other virgins of her monastery, and was striving to pronounce every word attentively, but since she was often distracted through human infirmity, she said mournfully to herself: "And what fruit can be derived from this endeavour, which is combined with so much inconstancy?" The Lord, therefore, wishing to console her, showed to her his Heart, that treasury of all good and of all blessedness, and said: "Behold, I display to the eyes of thy mind my most sweet Heart, to which thou shalt confidently commend all things which, of thyself, thou art unable to accomplish, that they may be fulfilled for thee; for thus will they all appear very perfect in my sight. Assuredly, my divine Heart, knowing the frailty and inconstancy of man, with

desire always expects that thou shouldst, if not in words, at least in thought, commit to it whatever thou canst not of thyself perform, to be supplied, amended, and perfected for thee." Therefore, after finishing the Hours, which must be read not only with the mind, but also pronounced with the lips, anyone may pray in this or in like manner: " O good Jesus, be merciful to me a sinner. I commend my tepid and distracted service to thy most sweet Heart, to be amended and perfected, and I offer it to thee for the salvation of all men, in union with that most perfect attention wherewith thou didst on earth praise and pray to thy Father. Hearken, I beseech thee, satisfy and supply for me most fully. Amen."

13. Another time, St Gertrude, feeling great difficulty in performing a certain work, said to God the Father, " O Lord, I offer thee this work, to thine eternal praise, through thine only Son, in the virtue of the Holy Ghost"; and she understood that as a thing looks green or yellow, seen through a green or yellow glass, so everything which is offered to the Father through the Son, and everything which is humbly asked through the Son, is made magnificent beyond all human estimation, and becomes most acceptable to God the Father.

CHAPTER IV

DAILY DEFECTS AND THEIR REMEDIES, WITH CONSOLATION UNDER TEMPTATIONS

1. The fight against daily shortcomings is ordained for the greater increase of piety.
2. The shortcomings of superiors are permitted for the greater merit both of themselves and of their subjects.
3. The humble avowal and correction of daily faults are an excellent preparation for the increase of grace.
4. Frequent faults do not lessen the perfection of love.
5. Love and resignation quickly blot out the stains of daily faults.
6. Impatience and anger should be quelled by thinking of Christ's meekness in his sufferings.
7. The correction of daily faults, made with sorrow and love, is most pleasing to God.
8. We should have a real fear of God's judgements, yet tempered with holy trust.
9. Evil thoughts, carefully quelled, purify and cleanse the soul.
10. The victory over impure imaginations is best attained by patience and hard work.
11. Even the holiest of God's servants were afflicted with grievous temptations in this life, that they might win a greater reward in the next.

1. ST GERTRUDE, severely rebuking and reproving herself for some slight fault, earnestly besought God to enable her to

amend it, and completely rid herself of it. To whom the Lord lovingly replied: "And wherefore wishest thou that I should be deprived of much honour, and that thou shouldst miss a great reward? For thou gainest a great reward every time that thou, acknowledging that or a similar defect, resolvest to avoid it for the future; and, whenever anyone for love of me labours to overcome his faults, he offers to me as much honour and fidelity as a soldier offers to his king by strenuously opposing his enemies in war, and manfully overcoming them."

2. When the same holy virgin was praying because of the defects of a person who was at the head of the community, our Lord appeared to her and said: "Out of the abundance of my divine pity, sweetness, and love, by which I have chosen this community, I permit some defects to remain in those who preside over it, in order that the merit of the community may be increased. For there is much more merit in submitting to one whose faults are known, than to one whose works seem perfect in every respect. I allow superiors to have some faults, and to be sometimes blemished by the diversity of their cares, that so they may be the more humbled. The merit of subjects is increased as much by the defects as by the perfection of those

who govern them; and, in like manner, the merit of those who govern well is as much increased by the progress as by the defects of their subjects." By these words of our Lord, St Gertrude understood the superabounding kindness of the divine wisdom, which so carefully provides for the salvation of the elect, permitting faults in them, in order that he may lead them to greater perfection. It seemed, therefore, to her, that even if the goodness of God shone forth in no other matter more than in this, yet God could not be sufficiently praised by every creature.

3. St Gertrude being confined to bed at the approach of Christmas, gave way to impatience, through human frailty. And she sorrowfully revolved her fault in her mind, thinking herself most unworthy of any of the gifts of God, since because of some little negligence of those who attended her she had fallen into such impatience. While doing this, she was divinely taught that every thought by which man sorrowfully renounces his faults, after fitting penance, prepares and disposes him to receive the grace of God—concerning which God says in Scripture: In whatever hour the sinner shall be converted, and repent, I will no more remember all his sins.*

* *Cf.* Ezech. xviii 21, 22.

4. Again, St Gertrude, through inordinate sadness and impatience, once experienced such darkness that she seemed to have lost in great part the joy of the divine Presence. This darkness was, however, afterwards mitigated through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When, therefore, being graciously visited by our Lord, she reflected on her impatience and her other faults, she was much displeased with herself, and said to our Lord in great dejection of mind: "O Lord, I beseech thee, put an end to my miseries, for I myself put no end to them. *Deliver me, and set me beside thee, and let any man's hand fight against me.*"*

And our Lord, having compassion on her desolation, enquired of her whether she would choose any delight in the world rather than him, and would prefer anything to him. To which she answered: "Far, far be it from me that I should ever prefer anything to thee, the true, supreme, unchanging, and eternal Good." And the Lord said: "Since thou dost prefer nothing to me, and desirest ever to submit thy will to mine, thou art clearly in grace and charity; wherefore, then, speakest thou so despondingly on account of thy sins?" For the Scripture is witness that *charity covereth a multitude of sins.*†

* Job xvii 3. † 1 Pet. iv 8.

5. When St Gertrude again gave way to impatience, and was, nevertheless, most graciously visited by God, she said at length to our Lord: "O most sweet God, how couldst thou bestow such consoling gifts of thy grace on me, who am now so unworthy and so unprepared?" The Lord answered: "Love constrained me." And she said: "Where are the stains contracted by me through the impatience which I felt and showed somewhat in my words?" To which the Lord replied: "The fire of my divinity hath consumed them." Then she said: "O most merciful God, since thy grace so often remedies my vileness, I should wish to know whether my soul will require to be purified after death from this impatience and from similar faults." As our Lord in his mercy delayed answering, she added: "Verily, O Lord, if the glory of thy justice required it, I would willingly of my own accord even go down into hell, that so I might make thee more worthy amends for my faults; but if it is more becoming to the bounty and mercy of thy nature that, by thy love, my stains be utterly effaced and reduced to naught, I fearlessly beseech thee that thy love may fully cleanse my soul from these stains." The Lord then, with his accustomed mercy, quickly granted her petition and desire.

6. Christ, gently reproving St Bridget for the anger and impatience which had disturbed her, said: "I, thy Creator and thy Spouse, have endured stripes for thee; but thou wert so impatient that thou couldst not endure even words. Standing before the judge when I was accused, I was silent, and opened not my mouth; but thou didst raise thy voice in bitter answers and reproaches. Thou oughtest to have borne all things patiently for my sake, who for thee was transfixed with nails; thou oughtest by thy patience to have won to a better mind him who had erred. Henceforth, be more cautious, and when thou art provoked by anyone to anger, speak not readily, until the anger shall have been removed from thy mind. When the disturbance of thy mind has passed away, and thou hast carefully weighed the cause of that disturbance, thou wilt be able to speak with gentleness. But if thou canst do no good by speaking, and there would be no sin in being silent, it will then be better and more meritorious for thee to hold thy peace."

7. St Gertrude was given to understand that the divine Heart feels ineffable sweetness each time that anyone reflects with sorrow on his having by distraction of mind, or by the dissipation of useless words and

works, fallen away from the Lord his God, who so graciously surrounds him with blessings at every hour and moment. She understood that when a man says within himself these or similar words, with compunction of heart: "Alas! miserable that I am, how have I wasted this time! how little have I fixed my thoughts on God, who loveth me!" and earnestly resolves to avoid such negligences and offences for the future, he becomes truly the tabernacle of God, in which the majesty of the Most High deigns to dwell, as in his own abode. And thus are our shortcomings supplied by the most holy conversation of the Son of God, and the faithful man is renewed in holiness of life; and hence there is joy in heaven, because the infinite goodness of God deigns to find delight in a truly penitent soul.

8. The Lord Jesus said to St Bridget: "Wherefore, O daughter, art thou anxious and disquieted?" She answered: "Because I am afflicted with many unprofitable and evil thoughts, which I cannot drive away, and the fear of thy judgements oppresses me." Then the Lord said: "This is true justice; that as thou hast formerly taken delight in the vanities of the world against my will, so thou shouldst now be molested by various perverse thoughts against thy own will. Do

thou, however, fear my judgements with moderation and discretion, ever firmly trusting in me thy God. For thou must know for certain, that evil thoughts, which the mind resists and detests, are the purification and crown of the soul. If thou art unable to avoid them, bear it patiently, and let thy will strive against them. And, although thou consent not to them, fear lest thou take pride in that and fall; for whosoever stands, stands by the power of God alone."

9. Again, the Lord said to St Bridget: "In order that man may understand his own weakness, and the strength he receives from me, it is necessary that he should sometimes be allowed to be attacked by evil thoughts; and if he consents not to them, they become the purification of his mind, and the safeguard of his virtues. And although they are hard to bear, they heal the soul, and conduct it to eternal life, which cannot be gained without sufferings. The soul should, therefore, labour diligently, lest it consent to them, or take any pleasure in them." Some are permitted to be more violently tempted in the beginning of their conversion, others in middle life, and others in old age. Hence the Mother of God said to St Bridget: "Thou dost wonder why temptations multiply upon thee in thy old age, and why thou

feelest now those which thou didst not experience either in thy youth or during thy married life. This comes to pass that thou mayest know that thou art nothing, and canst do nothing, without my Son. For, unless he kept thee, there is no sin so grievous that thou wouldst not commit."

10. The holy virgin St Catherine was, by the permission of God, bitterly tormented for several days by carnal temptations. For the evil spirits thrust themselves upon her eyes and ears, not only by the suggestion of obscene thoughts and the illusions of dreams, but also by manifest apparitions. They pictured to her images of men and women embracing each other immodestly in her sight, and by gestures, words, and actions, provoking her to wantonness. Thus was this most chaste virgin forced to see and hear what she most abhorred; and though she shut her eyes, those most filthy and abominable images yet remained before her. At the same time, she was deprived even of spiritual consolations, and felt not her usual fervour of devotion. She did not, however, on account of these troubles, omit her pious exercises, but persevered most diligently in prayer to the utmost of her power, saying to herself: "Thou, a most vile sinner, art unworthy of any consolation. What then,

would it not be enough for thee if thou wert preserved from damnation, even though thou shouldst have to bear these crosses and this darkness during thy whole life? Surely, thou didst not choose to serve God that thou mightest receive consolations from him here, but that thou mightest enjoy him for ever in heaven. Arise, therefore, and pursue thy accustomed exercises, and remain faithful to thy Lord."

Afterwards, when one demon maliciously said to her: "We will not desist, but will vex thee till thy death, unless thou consentest to us," she answered: "I have chosen affliction for my refreshment, nor will it be difficult, but pleasant to me to endure these and other sufferings for the honour of my Lord Jesus Christ, so long as it shall please him." At these words the whole troop of evil spirits fled in confusion, and a brilliant light, in which was the holy Virgin, illumined the place, and the Lord appearing to her said: "While thy heart was assailed by evil thoughts, I was hidden in the midst of it, and prevented thee from consenting to them or taking pleasure in them. I permitted thee to be tempted as much as was for thy good, that, with my help, thou mightest overcome."

11. The virgin St Gertrude was once most

clearly shown how God sometimes permits a man to be grievously assailed by many vices, in order that he may in the end more happily triumph, and obtain greater glory in heaven. She saw that many were faithful followers of chastity and purity (such were the Apostles of Christ), who indeed avoided all things that were open to suspicion, but admitted, as was reasonable, what was not open to it. And these, if they are assailed by any temptation, striving manfully with the help of God's grace, overcome it: but if, from human frailty, they sometimes give way a little, they labour to efface their fault by worthy fruits of penance.

The blessed Augustine thus exhorts combatants of this sort: "Attend, O ye saints who are fighting. I speak to combatants; those who fight, understand; whosoever fighteth not, understandeth me not. The chaste man wishes that on no account should any desire contrary to chastity arise in his members. He wishes for peace, but he hath it not yet. For if he had attained to this, that no adverse desire should arise, there would be no enemy with whom to strive; nor is a victory expected where the enemy is already conquered and triumphed over. But now is the battle, whilst *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against*

*the flesh.** We do not the things that we would. Wherefore? Because we would that there were no lusts, but it cannot be. Whether we will or no, we have them;† whether we will or no, they excite, they entice, they provoke, they molest, they will arise, they are repressed, they are not yet extinguished. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that you do not the things that you would. What do ye desire, O saints! O good combatants! O valiant soldiers of Christ! what do ye desire? That evil lusts should in nowise exist. But it cannot be. Carry on the war, hope for the triumph. Do what ye are able to do, as saith the same Apostle in another place: *Let not sin reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof.*‡ He saith not, let there be no sin; but, let it not reign. So long as thou livest, there must be sin in thy members; only let the power be taken away from it, let not its commands be obeyed." Thus saith St Augustine.§

* Gal. v 17.
† *Cf.* Rom. vii 15, 16.
‡ Rom. vi 12.
§ Serm. 43, *De Verbis Domini.*

CHAPTER V

OF FREQUENT CONFESSION AND THE DESIRE TO CONFESS

1. The usefulness of weekly confession.
2. Even venial sins should be confessed, since a new sacramental grace is given in each confession.
3. When confession is an impossibility, the good will to confess is as good as the deed.
4. Sins forgotten in confession are forgiven, provided there has been a careful examination of conscience.
5. God-fearing men may communicate without previous confession when obedience bids it and a confessor is not at hand.

1. CHRIST said to St Bridget: "It is useful to him who desires to acquire and to retain my Spirit and my grace, that he should frequently confess his sins and negligences to a priest, that so he may he cleansed." And when she saw the soul of her husband Ulpho in purgatory, she said: "O happy soul! what was it that most contributed to thy salvation?" He answered: "My confessions, which I was accustomed (when I could have access to a priest) to make every Friday, with a firm purpose of amendment."

2. A certain virgin in a religious order, who had lived very piously, coming to the

hour of her death, had to be cleansed before her departure from the fault of having sometimes neglected the grace of sacramental confession. For occasionally, when the other virgins her companions prepared themselves for confession to the priest, as her conscience did not reproach her with any grave fault, she did not care to be absolved by the words of the priest from the mere dust, as it were, of venial sins, from which no human life can be free; but feigned to be asleep when the priest came to hear their confessions.

3. When St Bridget was living in Rome, a certain man came there to make sacramental confession of his sins, but he could not obtain a confessor, because none of the priests understood his language. And when St Bridget consulted our Lord on his behalf, our Lord answered: "He laments because he cannot find anyone to hear his confession; but thou shalt tell him to be of good courage. When a man is not able to do the good work that he desires to do, the will is sufficient. For what brought salvation to the thief on the cross? Was it not his good will? And what constitutes hell, but an evil will and inordinate affections? Therefore, let this poor man remain firm and not draw back. When he has returned to his own country, let him seek from wise and just men those

things which are salutary for his soul, and let him listen to them, submitting his will to them, and following their counsel rather than his own inclination or his own judgement. And if he should die on the way thither, it shall be with him as I, hanging upon the cross, said to the thief: *Thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*"* Without doubt a good will is a great and sweet treasure. He who has this, desires and endeavours to obey and to please God, and to do those things which are acceptable to him. This is the foundation and the root of all holy virtues. It springs from the Holy Spirit, and is a great grace of God and an infused love. Blessed is he who has received it from God, and who studies to keep it.

4. St Gertrude once complained to St John the Evangelist that she feared lest she should incur some loss because, through forgetfulness, she sometimes omitted to confess to the priest some things—though of lesser importance—since she had not, in the meanwhile, access to a priest, and they escaped her through the weakness of her memory. St John sweetly consoled her with these words: "Fear not, O daughter; for whenever thou preparest thyself with a perfect will to confess all thy sins, and wishing for a priest thou

* Luke xxiii 43.

canst not obtain one, those things which thou omittest through forgetfulness to confess, will shine before the merciful Lord like precious jewels in thy soul, and make thee appear wonderfully gracious in the sight of all the citizens of heaven."

5. When St Gertrude was once praying for some other virgins of her convent, who by her desire had humbly received the holy Eucharist, although, because of the absence of the confessor, they had not made a sacramental confession, our Lord seemed to clothe them with a perfectly white garment —that is to say, his own innocence. This garment was adorned all over with bright shining jewels, in form and in fragrance like violets; and by these was denoted the humility with which they had received Communion, simply following her instructions, and confiding in the goodness of God. Afterwards there was given to them also a rose-coloured garment, interwoven with golden flowers, figuring our Lord's passion, perfect in love, by which passion any man obtains the merit of worthy preparation. But a rose-coloured garment alone, interspersed with golden flowers, was given to those sisters who, not by the advice of St Gertrude, but of their own accord (the grace of God co-operating with them), had

communicated, though they had not confessed their sins to a priest. Lastly, those who with humility and sorrow had abstained from Communion, seemed to be present at the heavenly banquet, and to rejoice greatly in the abundance of its delights.

CHAPTER VI

OF FREQUENT COMMUNION

1. Frequent communion should not be forbidden where there is no consciousness of mortal sin.
2. This is true for all—clerics, religious, seculars, or layfolk.
3. The punishment for neglecting frequent Communion.
4. The delight of a devout Communion far exceeds any earthly delight.
5. The Eucharist is the sweetest reminder of divine love.
6. Preparation for Communion with burning love.
7. Preparation for Communion in union with the merits of all the saints.
8. It is pleasing to God when anyone, out of obedience, discreetly abstains from Holy Communion; but it is more pleasing when we use it frequently out of love.
9. All the saints honour and help those who humbly and worthily communicate.

1. AGAIN, when St Gertrude prayed for a certain virgin, who, moved by zeal for justice, made other pious sisters timid by her words, and deterred them from frequent reception of the holy Eucharist, our Lord answered her: "*Since my delights are to be with the children of men,** and I have, therefore, out of supreme love left this Sacrament

* Prov. viii 31.

to be received by the faithful in commemoration of me, and also will, through it, to remain with them, even to the consummation of the world; whosoever by words or persuasion withdraws from the reception of it those who are free from mortal sin, impedes and interrupts my delights, which I might have with them. For he is like a severe schoolmaster, who harshly separates the king's son from his poor and ignoble companions—in whose society the king's son himself greatly delights—judging it more becoming that the youth should have royal honours, than that he should play at ball with them in the streets. But if any one proposes to lay aside and avoid such severity, I not only pardon him, but I am as much pleased as would be the king's son if the schoolmaster with a severe and gentle countenance brought back his beloved companions to play with him."

2. St Gertrude also understood from our Lord, that they receive not the holy Eucharist irreverently or unworthily, who receive it piously from a desire for the honour, praise, and glory of God; for in this doth that divine glory most conspicuously shine forth, that his Supreme Majesty disdains not to communicate himself to men so unworthy. Therefore, all pious priests, and also monks and

nuns of good will, who sincerely seek after God and their own salvation, striving to keep their rule and the holy statutes of their congregation, passing their time usefully, and who, when they are negligent, or transgress in any point, confess sincerely to their priest whatever their conscience shows them to be sinful; these ought to have great confidence in God, and thus to receive through his mercy and goodness the Sacrament of the Eucharist as often as it is given by the rule, or as they have the good custom of receiving it. In like manner, all laymen and women living in any condition allowed by God and the Church, whether married or single, whether they buy or sell, or gain their livelihood in any other lawful way, if with a good will they persevere by the grace of God in well-doing, refraining from grave faults, and wish to direct their lives according to the precepts of God and the decrees of holy Church, and confess their sins with a humble heart to the priest; all these trusting in the mercy of God, may receive the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist on solemn feasts or on the days appointed by their spiritual Father. For, although they may be variously occupied in external affairs, and often fall into slight faults, they are yet just in all things according to their power, and there-

fore are pleasing to God. But among those who wear secular attire, some are occasionally found so pure and fervent, or so holy, that they may receive Holy Communion every day.

3. The soul of a certain deceased person appeared in flames of intense fire to a servant of God, and said that he was suffering such dire torments solely because he had been negligent about the reception of the Lord's Body, adding that he would soon be liberated if that person would but once devoutly receive the adorable Sacrament for him. When the servant of God had done this, the soul appeared to him on the following day brighter and more refulgent than the sun, having been, by that one reception of this most worthy Sacrament, delivered from intolerable pains, and conveyed to eternal bliss in heaven.

4. Christ Jesus said to St Gertrude: "When I communicate myself to thee in the Sacrament of the Altar, I caress thee with embraces and kisses; and this delight is incomparably greater than anyone can ever experience from human embraces and kisses. For the delight of human embraces and kisses is vile, and passes away with time; but the sweetness of that union by which thou art united to me in the Sacrament of the

Altar is most noble and pure, nor can it ever fail or diminish, but the oftener it is renewed, the more vigorously doth it flourish to all eternity."

5. The Lord said to St Catherine: "The heart of man ought truly to be pierced and melted by considering, among the benefits bestowed by me, the exceeding benefit of the holy and venerable Eucharist. But this is to be looked upon with the eye of the intellect and of faith, not only with the eye of the body: for the eye of faith discerns, under the insignificant species of bread, the true God and true Man. O how great is the excellence and dignity of receiving in a state of grace this wonderful and unspeakable Sacrament! For it is the bread of life and the food of angels. He who fitly receives it, *abideth in me, and I in him.** My incomprehensible love provideth for you this salutary food, that in this life, in which you are wayfarers and pilgrims, you may hence derive solace and refreshment, and that the memory may remain with you of the passion and precious Blood of my only-begotten Son."

6. Christ said to St Mechtild: "When thou art about to receive Holy Communion, do thou desire and wish to the praise of my name, to have all the desire and all the love

* John vi 57.

for me with which any heart has ever been inflamed, and thus draw near to me. For I shall regard and accept that love from thee, not as it is in thee, but as thou wishest it to be in thee."

7. When St Gertrude was about to receive the Body of Christ, being grieved that she was ill prepared, she besought the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, that they would offer for her to our Lord all the worthiness with which any one of them had ever been prepared to receive the grace of God. Wherefore our Lord said to her: "Thou dost truly now appear to all the citizens of heaven adorned as thou didst desire to be." It is good, therefore, that whosoever is about to receive Holy Communion, should also desire and seek to have his soul adorned with the merits and virtues of Jesus Christ and his saints.

8. Once, when St Gertrude was very weak, she wished to receive the divine Eucharist—for which she had diligently prepared herself—yet, by the advice of her spiritual mother, for the sake of discretion, she did not receive it. And on her offering this to our Lord, to his eternal praise, the Lord, bending towards her, received her into the bosom of his paternal kindness, and, sweetly caressing her, said: "Because thou didst determine

to omit receiving me, purely for my sake, I will cherish thee in my bosom." Then St Gertrude understood that to omit Holy Communion, not from negligence, but from discretion, or out of obedience, is not displeasing, but pleasing to God.

It is, therefore, praiseworthy to abstain sometimes from the sacramental reception of the Eucharist through humility and holy fear or reverence; but it is much better to receive it frequently through love, and desire for the glory of God and the common good, or out of special devotion. Assuredly, since this most excellent Sacrament is the fountain of all grace, and the medicine of the soul, no one ought lightly to forgo its reception, because, perchance, he does not feel spiritual sweetness and consolation, or because he is afflicted with grievous and importunate temptations. For he, who communicates piously and humbly, reaps great benefit, not only for himself, but also for others, living and dead. But he who, being impeded by hatred of his neighbour, or by any other grievous crime, fears not to receive the holy Eucharist, incurs eternal damnation.* Such a one is inevitably lost, unless he be reconciled to God by penance.

9. The handmaiden of Christ, Mechtild,

* *Cf.* 1 Cor. xi 29.

was once confined to her bed, while the other virgins of her convent received the holy Eucharist. When she, therefore, lamented, sighing deeply to the Lord in poverty of spirit, she saw the Lord arise from his throne, saying: *By reason of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor, now will I arise.** And when he arose, all the saints likewise arose, offering to God for the spiritual consolation of the sick person, and to the eternal praise of God, the homage which they had rendered to God on earth, and those things which they had suffered for his sake. By which Mechtild understood that whenever a soul in poverty of spirit sends up sighs or groans to God, desiring his grace, all the saints immediately implore grace and obtain pardon for that soul, provided the soul sighs with grief for its sins. And the Lord said: "When thou sighest after me, thou drawest me to thyself. Behold, man by his will alone acquires not anything, however vile and worthless; but me anyone may possess by his will, or even by a single sigh."

* Ps. xi 6.

CHAPTER VII

OF PARTICIPATION IN THE MERITS OF CHRIST AND THE VALUE OF OBEDIENCE

1. How easily Christ will receive our good will.
2. How we can put on the merits of Christ and make them our own.
3. Obedience is to be practised not only by religious, but also by seculars.
4. Obedience is to be preferred even to the heights of contemplation.
5. It is the most pleasing sacrifice to God.
6. A good work, done of one's own accord, wins a simple reward; when done out of obedience, it carries off a double prize.

1. St Mechtild praying for a certain person who was grieved that she had shed many tears almost fruitlessly, our Lord answered: "Let her beseech me through my goodness to accept all the tears she has shed, as if she had shed them out of love for me, or from devotion or contrition. For if she does this piously, she will, without doubt, succeed according to her faith and hope in my goodness."

O marvellous and stupendous condescension of the divine mercy, which relieves the wretched with such consolations! For what has been said of tears, may also be

applied to past sadness, and to any tribulation, misery, or pain, which a person thinks he has endured in vain.

2. When St Mechtild, at the request of another, besought our Lord that he would deign to give that person a pure, humble, and spiritual heart, full of desires, she received this answer: "All that he wishes and stands in need of, he will find in me. Therefore, whatsoever is wanting to him in purity, humility, desire, or love, let him supply, or seek to have it supplied from the good that is in me, and let him take to himself all my divine conversation."

She answered: "O sweetest God, if it is so pleasing to thee that man should take thy virtues to himself, tell me, I beseech thee, how he is to do this." And our Lord replied: "Let him offer to my heavenly Father or to me, my purity and innocence for his impurity, my humility for his pride, my pity and charity for his hard-heartedness and tepidity, and lastly, my most holy and perfect conversation for his negligent and imperfect life. Let him offer also his desires, thoughts, words, prayers, tears, griefs, troubles, and works, in union with my desires, thoughts, words, prayers, tears, griefs, troubles, and works; for thus will they all be most pleasing to God. Every holy prayer will indeed

pierce the heavens, but that which is united to my prayers is by far more excellent and worthy. Let him also study to imitate my virtues according to his measure, and to govern his life and actions after the pattern of my life and conversation."

3. Christ has often deigned to reveal that every Christian ought to imitate his humble obedience towards his heavenly Father, and towards men both good and wicked. And this most important virtue may be well cultivated and practised, not only by monks and nuns, but by all men. Obedience brings man into subjection to the Church, and to her sacraments, pastors, superiors, and to all her dogmas, precepts, institutions and customs. It renders him prompt and accommodating in giving advice, in affording help and service, both temporal and spiritual, with discretion, and according to each one's necessities. The truly obedient man readily abandons his own judgement and opinion, and utterly renounces his own likes and dislikes; wherefore he need not fear hell. For an evil self-will, which is the foundation of all sins, alone constitutes hell; take that away, and hell will be no more. The truly obedient man gives up his own will, and delays not to execute whatever is required of him; as soon as anything is enjoined he is ready—yea, he

often waits not for a command. He submits himself not only to God and his superiors, but even to all men; and the more men are his inferiors, the more he delights in subjection, the more willingly he obeys them; for here he finds more mortification of himself than when he submits to those above him. No one is so barren and destitute of divine grace but can, if he wills to obey promptly, for God's sake, grow and flourish and produce abundant fruit. Doubtless, the safest way to heaven, and that by which the snares of the devil are most easily avoided, is obedience, by which a man of good will submits himself and chooses not to live by his own judgement, but arranges all his works and all his affairs, especially those that are arduous, by the wholesome and holy counsel of a spiritual and enlightened confessor. By this resignation of himself all a man's works abound with grace: but it is difficult to discern whether the works which a good man does of his own judgement are done by nature or by grace. He, however, who has no one whom he can fitly obey in all things, and by whose advice he can regulate his works, should, nevertheless, keep himself in the disposition to obey, if he could meet with such a one.

4. If anyone has attained, by the gift of God, to so high a degree of sanctity that he has

God ever visibly present and abiding with him, he should humbly say to God, when he is called by obedience to any work: " O most sweet God, permit me, I beseech thee, to perform this work for love of thee." For this abandonment of his own will is much more pleasing to God than if that man had then with all the blessed spirits penetrated heaven, as is shown by the following example. For when Jesus had appeared in the form of a little child to a certain virgin praying in her cell, she was required by obedience to do some work of the community. She immediately left the child Jesus, and with a willing mind and cheerful countenance performed what she was bidden to do. Then quickly returning to her cell, she saw her beloved Lord, whom she had left a child a little while before, standing in perfect stature, as a most beautiful youth of four-and-twenty years old. And when the virgin enquired how, in so short a time, he had grown so much, he answered: " The deep humility of thy swift and ready obedience made me so tall in so short a time. Wherefore, O most dear daughter, if thou wishest always to please me and to cleave to me, always obey promptly for love of me." And having said these words, our Lord disappeared. He is wise, therefore, who straightway postpones his meditations

and prayers, and any other holy work or exercise, that he may obey for God's sake.

5. Christ said to St Bridget: "All true virtues spring from love, as branches from a tree; and among these virtues obedience holds the first place. Wherefore he is most pleasing to me who, out of humility, submits himself, and places his will in the hands of others, thus choosing not to follow it. For I also, who am the most perfect of all, and perfection itself, was obedient to my Father, even unto death, that I might show by my example how pleasing it is to God to deny one's own will. But many who attend not to this virtue of obedience, and whose zeal is not discreet, follow the ideas of their own minds, and by their own judgement, but not by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, afflict their flesh so immoderately for a time, that for long after they are useless to themselves, little acceptable to God, and very burthensome to others. The counsels of the wise should be listened to; for I desire the death of sin, not of the flesh. He who, putting aside his own imaginations, submits his mind to others, will receive a double crown, and an increase of spiritual devotion. Obedience, which admits no self-will nor evil inclination, pleases me more than a great sacrifice."*

* *Cf.* 1 Kings xv 22.

6. St Bridget also heard the Lord Jesus speaking thus: "He who would rather fast than eat, and who yet takes food by obedience, will have the same reward as he who rightly fasts. And he will receive a similar reward, who eats because he is ill, though he would rather fast in honour of me." The Blessed Virgin, moreover, said to St. Bridget: "Let there be two men, one living under obedience, and the other at liberty; if he who is free fasts piously, he will have a single reward; if he who lives under obedience fasts not, but even eats meat temperately, according to his Rule, though he would wish to fast if obedience did not stand in the way, he will obtain a double reward—that is to say, one for his obedience, and another for the mortification of his own will and desire.

"Do thou, therefore, O daughter, refresh thy body moderately with what is necessary. *Make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences,** but abstain from unlawful indulgence. Fast, and pray, and visit holy places; these are, indeed, good works in themselves; but, unless they are done discreetly, humbly, and out of love, they merit not eternal life."

* Rom. xiii 14.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE REFRESHMENT OF THE BODY

1. The refreshment of the body by means of any food, provided it is not forbidden or taken immoderately, is pleasing to God.
2. There are few who do not sometimes sin by exceeding the bounds of necessity in the matter of bodily refreshment.
3. Prayer should be offered before food, sleep, and other bodily comforts.
4. The lawfulness of the discreet use of the bath.
5. Becoming and moderate recreation is lawful at stated times.

1. St Bridget was sometimes vehemently tempted to gluttony. While she was praying, there appeared to her in spirit the devil and a good angel, the one in the form of a hideous negro, the other in that of a beautiful youth. And, when the demon, taunting Bridget whom he was tempting, said to the angel that she made use of dainty food, and led a life of little severity while she boasted of her abstinence, the angel answered: "Christ the Lord considers not much what things anyone eats, provided they be not forbidden, and be taken with a pure intention, that is, out of true love, with moderation and without inordinate desire. Purple, and fine linen,

and delicacy of body exclude not from heaven, if humility and charity are also present. The habits of a refined education should sometimes be retained, with giving of thanks, lest the body be grievously weakened."

2. The blessed Augustine, speaking to God, saith: "I being exposed to temptations, strive daily against the concupiscence of eating and drinking. And who is there, O Lord, who is not, at times, carried beyond the bounds of necessity? Whoever he is, he is great, and let him magnify thy name: I am not he; for I am a sinful man. But I also, O heavenly Father, magnify thy name; and may thy only-begotten Son, who overcame the world, intercede with thee for my sins, numbering me among the weak members of his body."*

3. The virgin St Gertrude understood by divine inspiration that it is most pleasing to God, and most beneficial to man, if a man says in his heart or with his voice such words as these, before his food, sleep, and other refreshment of the body: "Grant, O Lord, that I may take this food, or any other relief of the body, purely for the glory of thy name, in union with that love with which thou, made man, didst take similar refreshment on earth,

* *Confess.*, Book X, ch. xxxi.

to the praise of God the Father, and for the salvation of the whole human race."

Again, when the same bride of Christ, Gertrude, in eating, piously reflected on these words: "May the virtue of thy divine love, O most sweet Jesus, incorporate me wholly into thee"; and on these in drinking: "O most loving Jesus, pour into me, and preserve within me the energy of the divine love, which reigned supreme in thy inmost Heart, so that it may penetrate all my substance, and evermore flow through every sense and faculty of my body and soul, to thine eternal praise"; when, I say, she practised this devotion during her meals, she heard our Lord saying to her: "As often as anyone shall think on these things in eating and drinking, so often will I confess that I have eaten and drunk with him, and that I have received from him a most grateful refreshment."

4. When St Bridget had made use of baths, by the advice and desire of her spiritual guide, Christ said to her: "The washing of the body is not hurtful to a pure soul, so that it be done with discretion, and without seeking for pleasure in it. Wherefore thou didst please me better by obeying thy spiritual father against thy will, than if thou hadst followed thine own inclination. Many of my

elect have not made use of medicines for the body, and they were acceptable to me. But others have applied remedies to themselves, having regard to the requirements of place, time, and maladies; and these have not displeased me, because they did it for my honour, that they might serve me better."

5. St Bridget heard in spirit the Blessed Virgin Mary say thus: "The friends of God may now and then, or at fixed times of the day, receive exterior consolation, uttering edifying words, and taking lawful and moderate recreation to the honour and praise of God. If the fist be kept always clenched, the nerves contract, and the hand is weakened; and the bow which is too far bent is more easily broken. Therefore, on account of the weakness of the flesh, moderate rejoicing is pleasing to God."

Christ also, prescribing to St Bridget and her family a mode of life somewhat like that of a religious order, allowed that, after the hours appointed for silence, prayer, and other spiritual exercises, they should freely converse among themselves of lawful and harmless things.

CHAPTER IX

OF THE MANNER AND REGULATION OF OUR SLEEP

1. Before sleep we should examine our conscience, ask pardon, promise amendment, and commend body and soul to God.
2. We should do the same upon rising in the morning.
3. Even our sleep should be for the glory of God.
4. When tired out with watchings we can offer our weariness to God.
5. God sometimes sends us dreams for our own good.

1. THAT necessary sleep should be allowed to the body, has been frequently revealed by Christ to St Bridget and others. But everyone, before he gives himself up to his nightly repose and goes to sleep, ought diligently to examine his conscience, and to reflect upon how he may have neglected his duties or offended God during the day; he ought to seek pardon of God for his faults, and resolve to amend his life with the help of God; he ought to commend his soul and body to God, and also to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to his holy guardian angel, and making the sign of the cross, thus place himself modestly in bed.

2. Likewise on rising from sleep, he ought to fortify himself with the sign of the cross,

and commend himself to God; he ought to desire and pray that whatever he shall that day do, say, or think, may tend to the eternal praise and glory of God.

3. Our Lord said to St Mechtild: "When anyone is going to sleep, let him meditate on something concerning me, or converse with me. Thus will his mind watch with me, though his body sleeps; and if when he suffers from any evil dreams, he feels displeasure and annoyance thereat on awaking, it is a sign that he was in nowise separated from me. Let him who is about to sleep also desire that I may receive every breath he draws that night as a slight tribute of praise to me; and I, who cannot refuse the holy wishes of a pious and loving soul, will in truth fulfil this his desire."

4. When St Gertrude had passed nearly a whole night without sleep, and was greatly weakened and exhausted by it, she offered this loss of her strength to God to his eternal praise, for the salvation of all men. To whom our Lord said: "When anyone wearied and worn out with watching beseeches me to grant him some repose in sleep to my praise and for the renewal of his strength, if I do not then grant his request, and he, taking patience, endures his want with humility; this is most pleasing to my mercy.

And it is infinitely more acceptable to me when one who is sleepless in illness offers to me humbly and patiently the loss of his strength, than when one watches in prayer during a whole night who, being in good health, is well able to watch."

5. The same virgin, Gertrude, was one night visited by our Lord in her sleep so sweetly that by the company and presence of God she seemed to herself to be refreshed with delicate food. And awaking she gave thanks to God, and said: "O Lord my God, what have I, a most vile sinner, deserved above others, who are often so oppressed by dreams that they even terrify others by their cries?" The Lord answered: "When those whom my divine providence designs to sanctify by afflictions, bestow more care than they ought on the solace of their bodies while they are awake, and thus deprive themselves of occasions of merit, I send them troubles in their dreams out of my divine love, that so they may at least gain some merit." And she replied: "O Lord, can they merit by those things which they suffer without intention, and almost against their will?" Then the Lord said: "My mercy effects this. They indeed are clothed and adorned, although not with gold and jewels, at least with ornaments of bronze."

CHAPTER X

OF THE ADVANTAGE OF TRIBULATIONS

1. Afflictions bring with them the special companionship of God.
2. Every suffering borne for God increases merit.
3. Suffering increases merit even though we have vainly tried to avoid it, provided we afterwards bear it patiently for love of God.
4. The humble acceptance of afflictions is the sign of divine espousal.
5. The grace of God perfects some in consolations, others in desolation and bitterness.
6. The loss of friends, patiently offered to God, wins the divine friendship.
7. Our sorrows should be offered to God for him to sweeten.
8. Every suffering should be taken as if coming from the hand of God.
9. It is dangerous to wish to choose sufferings and not leave them to the will of God.
10. To pick and choose this suffering rather than that is a dangerous kind of impatience.
11. The way of patience should be followed.
12. Another way of patience.
13. Resignation in afflictions.
14. God sometimes withdraws consolations.
15. All the pains and penalties of this life are disorders in the will: the truly patient feel no suffering.

1. AGAIN, the holy Gertrude knew by divine inspiration that our Lord, *whose delights*

*are to be with the children of men,** finding nothing pleasing in man, that would make it fitting that he should deign to consort with him, sends him tribulations and afflictions, both bodily and spiritual, which may give him the opportunity of remaining with man; for the Scripture of truth saith: *The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart.*† And again, the Lord himself saith: *I am with him in tribulation.*‡

2. A certain person, occupied in manual labour, was suddenly grievously hurt, and suffered great pain. St Gertrude, taking compassion on her, besought our Lord that he would not permit a member of the community to be in danger who was hurt in the course of her righteous labour. Our Lord answered her: "That member will be nowise in danger; but will receive an incomparable reward for the pain she endures. All the other members also, who exert themselves to serve the injured one, and who alleviate and heal her pains, will in like manner obtain for this an eternal reward. Then she said: "And how can the members thus serving each other merit so much, since they do it, not in order that the injured member may bear her pain more patiently for thy sake,

* Prov. viii 31. † Ps. xxxiii 19.
‡ Ps. xc 15.

but that the pain may be diminished or removed?" To which our Lord answered, in words of inestimable consolation, saying: "When a man, after the remedy has been applied, bears patiently, for love of me, the pain which he cannot by his own endeavours alleviate, he gains an incomparable reward and merit, since I have sanctified such sufferings by those words in which I prayed to my Father at the moment of my extreme necessity, saying, *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me.*"* And she replied: "Is it not more acceptable to thee, O Lord my God, that a man should bear with resignation whatever may happen to him, than that he should be patient when he cannot in any way escape from it?" Our Lord answered: "This is hidden in the secrecy of my divinity, and surpasses all human understanding. But, as far as human judgement can discern, those two are like two colours, of such elegance and beauty that men can hardly decide which of them is to be preferred to the other."

3. Our Lord said again to St Gertrude: "When my elect rightly desire any good, my loving-kindness, with which I delight in the salvation of men, compels me to deem that they have desired me. Where-

* Matt. xxvi 39.

fore, if those who are weighed down by sickness of body or desolation of mind, piously desire health or deliverance, I account them to have desired me, that I may be able the more copiously to reward them according to the burning love of my heart, provided they do not wish for health in order to do evil."

4. St Gertrude also divinely learnt that, as a ring is the sign of espousals, so adversity, whether bodily or spiritual, humbly borne for God's sake, is a true sign of the divine election, and, as it were, the espousal of the soul with God, in so far that the afflicted may confidently say these words: "My Lord Jesus Christ hath betrothed me with his ring." For if, in the midst of adversity, he can by the gift of God praise God, and from his heart give thanks to him, he already obtains, like a beloved spouse, a crown from the Lord; since gratitude in adversity is the most beautiful and precious crown of the soul.

5. St Gertrude once heard the Lord Jesus gently saying to her: "Behold, I exhibit to thee the abundance of the sweetness of my divine Heart, that thou mayest draw from it, and give liberally as much as and to whomsoever thou wilt." She, therefore, praying with special affection for a certain person, infused into that person's heart a good

measure of sweetness, drawn from the Heart of our Lord, which was immediately changed into bitterness. And, as Gertrude wondered greatly at this, the Lord said to her: "When I give grace to anyone, it produces the effect in him which is most conducive to his salvation. For to some it is more useful to be tried in the present life by divers afflictions, than to receive great sweetness and consolation. Therefore, in them my grace is converted into the bitterness of tribulations and sorrows, by which their salvation is more and more promoted, and their souls are adorned according to the good pleasure of my Heart. And, although this be hidden from them in this exile, yet they will the more sweetly experience it in eternity, in proportion as they have more faithfully laboured here, patiently enduring all adversities and troubles for the love of my name."

6. The Lord said also to St Gertrude: "When a man fears to lose, or has lost any beloved friend, if he offers to me, with his whole will, the grief which he feels, so that even if he could retain that friend he would yet be willing to part with him to my praise, so that my will rather than his might be done, he is indeed most acceptable to me. And after the moment when he so bent the wishes of his heart to my will, my loving-kindness

will preserve his offering in the same nobleness and perfection as when he first made it in his heart; and all the thoughts that afterwards from human frailty oppress his heart (as, for example, if he thinks thus: Thou mightest now have this or that consolation or help from thy friend, if he were here), will co-operate for his eternal salvation, and prepare a place in his soul for divine consolation."

7. When a certain devout and worthy virgin had died in the convent of St Gertrude, her death caused no small grief to the community. Our Lord, speaking to St Gertrude, said of her: "When anyone of you, recollecting the sweet manners of the departed, wishes to have her yet present; if she then offers her up to my will, she presents to me, by so doing, a lily of most sweet odour, and I will in my goodness repay her for it a hundredfold."

8. The Lord said to the blessed Mechtild: "When anyone bears any affliction, or even slight pain, with this intention, that he would willingly endure a greater pain for the love and praise of my name, if it so pleased me, he in that same moment revives, and becomes capable of receiving my grace, though his heart be ever so dry and covered with the rust of sin. If one who is afflicted offers his grief to me at once in the beginning, I,

partaking of it, render it sweet to him, and wonderfully ennoble it. But if he first drink of it, he pollutes it; and the more he drinks the more bitter it grows to him, so that afterwards it is not fitting for me to drink of, unless it be purified by penance and confession. Therefore, when a man suffers any injury, let him not impatiently complain to men, with many words, but let him instantly lay his grief before me, that I may pour into him the sweetness of my consolation, and encourage him to patience. If, however, he has neglected to do this in the beginning, let him not on that account lose confidence, but let him strive to offer it to me purified by penance, with a humble spirit and a contrite heart."

9. One of the Fathers says: "If thou be unjustly rebuked, humble thyself, and keep thyself patient; if, indeed, thou be justly reproved, then be thou much more humble and patient, and, being ready and willing to correct thyself, remain tranquil." Why, I ask, art thou disturbed when this or that person speaks evil of thee and accuses thee of many things which thou hast not even thought? Remember thy Lord Jesus Christ, who most patiently and gently endured evil words heaped upon him without cause. See that the peace of thy heart depend not on the tongues or judgement of men.

God, when he wills to purify and adorn one of his elect, often permits that he should be greatly contradicted in what he rightly does, even by those who are esteemed good, and in whose fidelity he most trusted. Whatever may happen, whatever evil may come upon thee, do thou ever flee to the Lord thy God, and hide thyself in him, and receive all things from his fatherly hand. Oh, what a joyful life thou wouldst lead, if thy heart were firmly fixed on God !

10. St Gertrude, moved by compassion, was praying for a person whom she had heard impatiently complaining that God had sent her trials that were not conducive to her salvation, and our Lord answered her: " Thou shalt tell her for whom thou prayest, that since no one can obtain the kingdom of heaven without at least some tribulation or suffering, she may choose and point out what trials she thinks would be of use to her, and when these things have come upon her, let her have patience." By these words of the Lord, Gertrude understood that it is a most dangerous kind of impatience when a man perversely and proudly wishes to choose what he ought to bear, saying that he cannot endure the afflictions that are sent him by God, and that they are not adapted to his salvation; for each one ought always to be

sure that whatever God lays upon him or permits to happen, is most suitable and most useful to him; and if he does not endure it altogether patiently, he ought to humble himself for this.

11. A certain virgin of most holy life said to one who enquired how she had attained to perfection: "(1) I received all adversity with a tranquil mind from the hand of the Lord; (2) and if anyone inflicted an injury upon me, I took care to return him some special benefits, which I should not have done if I had not been injured by him; (3) I complained of my trials to no one except God, wherefore I immediately received from him consolation and strength."

12. Another virgin of exceeding holiness, being asked by what practices she had arrived at perfection, humbly answered: "I was never so overwhelmed with pains and trials but that I sought to endure greater for the love of God, counting myself unworthy of those glorious gifts of God."

13. Another virgin, visited by the permission of God with an intolerable pain, seemed to herself to suffer the torments of hell; and when she had long been thus afflicted, turning at length with her whole heart to God, she said: "O most sweet God, remember, I beseech thee, and mercifully

consider that I am thy poor creature, and thou indeed my Lord and Creator. Behold, I offer myself to thy most just judgement, and entirely resign myself to thy most sweet will, and I am ready to endure these infernal torments so long as it may please thee; make use of me as thou willest in time, and in eternity." When she had made this act of resignation, the Lord straightway united that virgin to himself, and plunged her in the joyful abyss of his divinity.

14. A friend of God had wonderful things revealed to him by an interior light; but he besought the Lord that if it pleased him, he would withdraw this manner of grace from him. Therefore the Lord, having deprived him of that grace, left him for five years without consolation amid great temptations, difficulties, and calamities; and once when he was weeping bitterly, and two angels wished to console him, he said that he sought for no consolation, but that it abundantly sufficed him if the most sweet will of God were accomplished in him, and if he could be interiorly pure before God, and pleasing to him.

15. Our Lord said to St Catherine: "I will that thou shouldst know that all the pains which afflict men in this world consist in their will; for if the will were regulated

and conformed to my will, the pain would in a sense disappear. Although he whose will is thus sanctified and regulated may feel labours and sorrows, yet what he suffers cheerfully for love of me, is borne by him almost without pain, for he endures it most willingly, considering and knowing it to be my will that he should suffer. His mind is free in every bodily pain, since his will is in all things conformed and united to my will. Affliction or pain proceeds from the will, and entirely depends upon it, since man is afflicted by having what he wishes not to have, or by not having what he wishes. Therefore if his self-will be removed, the spirit of man is tranquil, and enjoys peace."

CHAPTER XI

OF CONFIDENCE IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE, AND PERFECT RESIGNATION

1. The providence of God orders all things unto the good of our salvation.
2. Therefore we should leave all to God and choose his good pleasure in all things.
3. The key of our own will should be committed to God.
4. Our own will should be submitted to the divine will.
5. Full trust in God should be joined with humility and innocence.
6. He greatly pleases God who chiefly trusts in God's kindness.

1. The virgin St Catherine, being once in ecstasy, saw and clearly understood that the Lord God, who is supreme Goodness, created man out of his ineffable charity, and that in the same charity and burning love he gives to man, or allows to happen, all things, whether consolations or tribulations, bestowing them both with no other aim than to provide for his salvation. Wherefore those are very blind and foolish who reprehend the works or the judgements of God, and murmur against him, being scandalized and disturbed by the things which come to pass. But blessed are those who, understanding

and believing in the holy providence of God, humbly receive all things as best from the hand of God, and give thanks for them, ever firmly hoping and trusting in the Lord.

2. St Gertrude heard from our Lord that every pious and faithful soul ought to give up its own will utterly to God, committing itself fully to his good pleasure, and implicitly trusting that, of his most gracious mercy, he wills in all things to bring about its salvation. Hence when Jesus, her beloved Spouse, appeared to her, bearing in his right hand health, and in his left sickness, and desiring her to choose which she would, she turned away from both the hands of our Lord, saying: "O Lord, I desire with my whole heart that thou shouldst not regard my will, but accomplish thy good pleasure in all things." He who desires to please God must commit himself and all belonging to him to the divine disposal with such perfect confidence, that he should even love to be ignorant of what the Lord wills to do in his regard, that so he may know the good pleasure of the divine Will to be more entirely accomplished in him.

3. Our Lord said also to St Gertrude: "Whosoever wishes me to come freely to him, must resign to me the key of his own will. And if it happens to him through human

frailty to take back the key he had given up to me, by doing his own will in anything, let him wipe out the fault by penance, and again give up his will to me; and the right hand of my mercy will receive him, and bring him forth with inconceivable honour to the kingdom of eternal glory."

4. The blessed Augustine says: "A man may wish something, while God wills otherwise. This is granted to human frailty and to human weakness. It is difficult for thee to avoid having a wish of thy own. But consider that God is above thee, and thou art under him; he is the Creator, thou the creature: he the Lord, thou the servant; and correcting thyself, and submitting thy will to his will, say with Christ: *Not as I will, but as thou wilt, my Father.** For thus shall thy heart be upright, and not perverse." Wherefore St Gertrude, by divine inspiration, read three hundred and sixty-five times these words of the Gospel: *Not my will, but thine be done, O most loving Jesus.*† And this she felt to be most pleasing to the Lord.

5. We read of the same virgin Gertrude, that neither dangers, nor tribulations, nor losses, nor any other difficulties, nor even her own sins or defects, could ever overcloud the constant and secure confidence she felt

* Matt. xxvi 39. † Luke xxii 42.

in the most gracious mercy of God. For she most certainly trusted that all things, adverse as well as prosperous, were turned to her good by the divine Providence. And to this virgin the Lord spoke thus: "The certain confidence which anyone has in me, the belief that I have truly the power, the knowledge, and the will to deal faithfully with him in all things, pierces my heart, and does such violence to my loving-kindness, that I can in nowise abandon or fail such a man."

6. Our Lord said to St Mechtild: "It is very pleasing to me that men should trust in my goodness and rely upon me. When anyone has humbly trusted in me, and rightly believed in me, I will be with him in this life, and will reward him beyond all his merits after death. How much soever anyone may trust in me, and piously expect from my goodness, so much and infinitely more shall he obtain; since it is impossible that a man should not receive what he has piously expected and hoped for. Therefore it is good for man to trust rightly in me, hoping for great things from me." Also when St Mechtild sought to know from our Lord what ought to be believed concerning his ineffable goodness, our Lord answered: "Believe with certain faith that I will receive thee after death, as a father receives his most

dear son, and that no father ever divided his inheritance with his only son so faithfully as I shall communicate all my good things and myself to thee. He shall be blessed who shall firmly and with humble love believe this of my goodness."

CHAPTER XII

OF A HAPPY DEATH

1. The Lord is at hand when his friends are dying, anxious, as it were, lest he should lose one who is dear to him.
2. Another example of the same consoling truth.
3. God gives confidence to counteract the fear of death.
4. We should be indifferent as to life or death, only ready to accept what best beseems God's glory.
5. The death of the just is sleep; for the unjust it is the entry into veritable death.
6. Against the fear of death a good conscience should arm itself with Christ's promises and the examples of the saints.
7. When about to die we should arm ourselves (1) with the sacraments, (2) with the prayers of the saints, (3) with the merits of Christ, and (4) perfect resignation to God's good pleasure.
8. A dying man is exhorted rather to make acts of charity than to dwell upon his sins.
9. Words of holy trust will arouse the dying man to hope.
10. Holy Mary and all the saints will stand by the deathbeds of their clients.

1. St Mechtild was once praying for a certain pious person, saying: "O most loving God, I beseech thee that in her last moments thou wilt purify her, and grant unto her certainty and confidence of attaining to thee." To which our Lord answered: "What prudent

man would of his own accord throw into the sea the merchandise and goods which he has brought to the port? Therefore, when I shall have brought into port, and to the end of life, her soul which I have guarded amid the various storms of the world, and shall have disposed of it according to my good pleasure, I will also take it up into glory."

2. Again, St Mechtild received this answer from our Lord when she prayed God that he would deign to be with another pious person in the last moments of her life, and give her the assurance of remaining with her: "The wise man throws not away the gold that he has acquired with labour and that is very dear to him. Nor will I abandon for ever her for whom thou prayest, who has been sanctified by my humanity, and received life through my Spirit in baptism."

3. St Mechtild in colloquy with our Lord said: "How comes it, O most sweet God, that when I think myself about to die, I feel little or no joy in it, while many anticipate that hour with great delight and desire?" The Lord answered: "This comes to pass by my dispensation; because if thou didst desire to die, thou wouldst by thy desire so move and attract my divine Heart, that I could not deny thee what thou didst seek." Then she said: "How is it that I, though so

miserable, am not terrified when I remember that I am to die, while those who are very perfect sometimes fear death?" To which the Lord replied: "Wherefore shouldst thou fear, who hast received my Heart as the pledge of an eternal compact, and for a house of refuge and an everlasting habitation?"

4. The blessed Gertrude, from the firm confidence she had in the goodness of God, often wished to die; and again she was so united to the will of God, that she was equally ready to live or to die, according to the good pleasure of God. She was once on a journey, when, having ascended a certain mountain, she fell down a slippery place, and rejoicing in spirit, she said to our Lord: "O good Jesus, how well it would have been for me if this accident had been the occasion of my attaining to thee more speedily!" And as those who were present asked her whether she feared not to die without being fortified by the sacraments, she answered: "I do indeed desire with all my heart to be fortified by the holy sacraments before I die; nevertheless I confidently prefer to them the providence and the will of the Lord my God; and whether he wills me to depart hence by a sudden or by a lingering death, his good pleasure will be acceptable to me. For by whatever manner of death I shall pass out

of this world, I hope that the mercy of God will never fail me, without which I cannot obtain salvation." And the same St Gertrude before her death spoke to our Lord in these words: "O my Lord, although it be beyond all delights desirable and joyful to me to be brought out of the prison of the flesh, and united to thee; yet if thou willest that I should remain here, I would rather live in extreme misery even to the day of judgement, to the praise of thy name." This resignation of the will the Lord declared to be most pleasing to him.

5. Christ said to St Bridget of some sick person: "Fear not, O daughter, she will not die, for her works are pleasing to me." And when she was dead, the Son of God again said: "Behold, O most dear one, that is true which I said; for she is not dead, but liveth, because her glory is great. In the just, the separation of the soul from the body is no more than sleep, since they awaken to eternal life. But you may truly call it death, when the soul being separated from the body, lives in everlasting death and punishment." He who loves worldly prosperity and gives not thanks to God, and having lived dissolutely dies in sinful dispositions, dies a bad death, even though his death be tranquil. On the other hand, he who loves God with his whole heart,

even though he be afflicted in many ways, and oppressed by long illness, and though he leave his body by a horrible, painful, and despised death, lives and dies happily; because in the elect, tribulation and a cruel death diminish or remove the punishment due to sin, and increase their reward. He who lives a good life cannot die a bad death.

6. Doubtless death is to the just the harbour of repose, as saith St Ambrose. To this harbour the holy Simeon looked forward, when holding in his arms the Child Jesus, and desiring to be delivered and brought out of the prison of the body, he said: *Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, in peace.** But someone at the hour of death may say that he is not just, and neither can nor ought to hope as the just hope. Let him who speaks thus trust in Christ, who justifies the wicked, and let him be humble and of good will; for thus being by faith and love united to God, he will by the grace of God be just. And if a pious man at the approach of death feels sad and fearful through weakness, let him cast upon God this terror and sadness, and resigning himself to it, let him look towards God with confident hope. In order to mitigate the fear of death, let him also recall to mind the words of the only

* Luke ii 29.

begotten Son of God, who is eternal Truth, saying in the Gospel: *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live : and every one that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die for ever.** Let him also meditate on these words of the Apostle St Paul: *Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*†

Let him reflect how willing to die were the just of ancient times, when the gates of the heavenly kingdom were not yet opened. For we read at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, that when the people of Israel were already near the promised land, the Lord said to Moses, who was leading that people: *Go up into Mount Nebo, and see the land which I will deliver to the children of Israel. Thou shalt see the land, and thou shalt not enter into it, but thou shalt be gathered to thy people, as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people; because you trespassed against me in the midst of the children of Israel at the waters of contradiction.*‡ And the Holy Scripture shortly after adds these words: *Then Moses went upon Mount Nebo and died there, by the command-*

* John xi 25, 26. † Rom. xiv 8.
‡ Deut. xxxii 49, 50.

*ment of the Lord.** Behold with what resignation of mind to the good pleasure of God, Moses, the friend of the Most High, accepted death. He entered not indeed into that visible land, but he was received into an invisible and better land—that is to say, into the secret bosom of peace, the limbo where the souls of the just reposed in great tranquillity. If the ancients were thus ready to die, surely we ought not unwillingly to endure death, now that the entrance to the heavenly country has been opened to us by Christ.

7. Let the dying man firmly hold the Catholic faith, and holily receive the sacraments of the Church, if he can obtain them; and let him rely rather on the merits of Jesus Christ, than on his own. Let him confide much in the prayers and the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints. Let him keep before his eyes the image of Jesus crucified, and reflect upon that ineffable charity with which our Lord willed to suffer and to die, and thus let him hide himself and repose wholly in his open and bleeding wounds, beseeching him that he will deign to wash away all his sins in those sacred wounds. Let him offer himself to the Lord to bear out of true love, according to his most sweet will,

* Deut. xxxiv 1, 5.

all the bitterness of suffering and death itself, and whatsoever the Lord may be pleased to send him in time and in eternity. If he acts thus, if he resigns himself utterly to the divine Will, humbly, lovingly, and fully trusting in the immense mercy and goodness of God, it cannot be that he should die a bad death. His death will be *precious in the sight of the Lord*,* even if he alone had committed all the sins of the whole world. Such a one deservedly rejoices in the presence of death, since his beauteous soul—which is a pure, rational spirit in the likeness of God—is about to be released from this miserable and painful prison, that it may henceforth without impediment enjoy its blessedness. There is no exercise more profitable to a man at the hour of death, than to give himself up freely to the will of God, and turning to him out of pure love, to confide firmly in his loving-kindness.

8. A certain friend of God, being asked what he would do at the approach of death, if he had lived long in grievous sin, answered: "If I had lived for forty years always in sin, and when the hour of my dissolution was at hand, I had sincerely confessed my sins, and if for the space only of one angelical salutation I had been able with perfect love

* Ps. cxv 15.

from the bottom of my heart so to betake myself to God as to be found wholly converted to him and turned away from all sin, then indeed I should depart out of this life as if pure and innocent. But if I had yielded to only one sin, and I were to depart hence contrite and grieving after a confession rightly made, I should then die as a penitent."

9. Our Lord has deigned to reveal to some of his friends that the words, which we are about to give, being spoken in the ears of the dying and recited before them, or being uttered and reflected on by themselves, are of such wonderful virtue that no one holding the Catholic faith can perish, if in his last moments he is able with a true and sincere heart humbly to pronounce these words or to meditate upon them within himself. They are as follows: "O Lord God, I am that miserable one, whom thou of thy fatherly goodness hast created, and redeemed from the power of the enemy through the most ignominious death of thy only begotten Son; thou alone hast power and dominion over me, and art able to save me according to thy boundless mercy, in which I hope and trust."

10. The Virgin Mary, Mother of God, said to St Mechtild: "I will, as a most loving mother, without fail be present at the death

of all those who piously and holily serve me, and will console and protect them." In like manner the other saints are undoubtedly ready to succour at the hour of death those who venerate and invoke them with special devotion.

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE PAINS OF PURGATORY

1. The pains of purgatory are mitigated through Our Lady's intercession.
2. The angels comfort the souls in purgatory.
3. The souls in purgatory are sustained by the good will they had while on earth.
4. The sufferings of purgatory far exceed all the sufferings of this life.
5. The souls of the departed are helped by the sacrifices and suffrages of the living and by the prayers of the blessed.
6. The Purgatory of love or desire.
7. The great power of prayers offered for the dead.
8. How great is the suffering of a soul in purgatory yearning for the vision of God.
9. The worm of conscience afflicts the soul even in purgatory.
10. The holy souls desire not to enter bliss until all their stains are cleansed and they have satisfied the justice of God.
11. Although they love not their sufferings, they desire only God's justice.

1. St Bridget heard the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, say as follows: "I am the Mother of God and the Mother of all who are in purgatory; because all the pains which they have to suffer for their sins are at some time, in some way, mitigated through my prayers. I am the Mother of all the just, and also of all sinners who wish to amend,

whom I cease not to defend and to save from every danger that threatens their salvation."

2. The holy angels also, as saith the blessed Mechtild, afford to the souls detained in purgatory the light of knowledge, solace, and assistance. St Bridget saw the soul of a certain king, who had led an evil life, but being urged by the grace of God in the last moments of his life, had thus reflected within himself: "Woe is me that I have most audaciously offended my Creator! O that even one little hour might be granted me, in which I might wholly turn to God, and give him thanks for his benefits! The sins which I have committed against God torment me more than the pain I suffer in my body. Even if I could never attain to heaven, I would yet wish to serve my most gracious Creator and Redeemer." Wherefore Christ the Judge said to the devil and to the guardian angel of that soul: "Thou, O devil, shalt trouble this soul, but thou, my angel, shalt console it, until it be brought forth into the light of glory." And to the soul itself he said: "It is permitted to thee to behold the holy angel, and to receive consolation from him, and to be a partaker of my Blood, and of the prayers of my Mother, and of Holy Church." Therefore the devil said to the soul which he was about to torture: "Because

thou hast fallen into my hands full of food and ill-gotten riches, I will now empty thee in my press." And then placing the king's head between his knees, he pressed it so violently that all the substance of his brains became no thicker than a leaf. Then he said again to the soul: "Because the place where virtues ought to be is vacant in thee, I will fill it; and inserting, as it were, the pipe of a bellows into the king's mouth, he blew into it so hard that the king's veins and nerves were miserably burst asunder, being filled with a fetid and horrible wind." Again the devil said to the soul: "Because thou wast merciless to thy subjects, who ought to have been, as it were, thy children, and didst oppress them, my arms shall bind thee round like serpents, and most cruelly rend and tear thee." But when the devil, repeating these punishments, would have increased them, St Bridget saw the angel of God stretching forth his hand, and forbidding him to aggravate them as before. In this manner the angel mitigated the pains at every repetition of the punishment. And the soul after each suffering raised its eyes to the angel, saying nothing, but by its gestures showing that it had received consolation from him and would soon be liberated.

3. Some souls in purgatory appeared to

St Gertrude in the form of most hideous toads, burning in horrible flames. There also appeared to her the soul of a certain soldier who had died fourteen years before, in the form of a huge beast suspended from a stake over the mouth of hell, and direfully tortured by receiving into itself the pains of hell. St Gertrude understood that the stake by which the soul was prevented from falling into hell, signified the good will which that soldier had sometimes, though rarely, had during his life.

4. A certain very pious monk, who had seen in a vision the torments of purgatory, said on returning to himself: "No tongue of man can express, nor imagination conceive, the variety, multiplicity, and severity of the tortures which I have seen the souls in purgatory endure. God is my witness that if any man had inflicted on me, and on all those dear to me, all the injuries and pains that can be inflicted in this life, or had even put them to death, and that I saw him given over to the torments I have beheld, I should be ready (if it were possible) to die a thousand times for his deliverance; so far do those pains which I have seen in purgatory exceed in degree and in kind all the pain, distress, bitterness, and misery of this life. Those, however, who are so direfully tormented, pass on by degrees to more tolerable pains."

5. St Gertrude saw the soul of a certain man of a religious order well known to her, as it were sitting at a table, sad, and with a downcast countenance, as not being yet purified nor worthy to enjoy the blissful contemplation of God. On this table were presented all the Masses, the Office of the Church, the prayers, and other pious works that were offered for that soul, and by these the soul was wonderfully strengthened. The Lord also, moved by his own loving-kindness, and the supplication of intercessors, always added something, in virtue of which that soul rejoiced, being greatly strengthened and relieved. In like manner the Blessed Virgin Mary seemed to place something upon it, that the soul might receive more consolation, which had, while it was in the body, worshipped her with especial devotion. Those also of the saints whom the soul had more particularly venerated on earth, added to the table in proportion as the soul being in the body had deserved by its greater or less labour and devotion. By all which means the soul, becoming more and more soothed from hour to hour, began more and more to lift its eyes to the most sweet light of the Divinity, which to behold in open vision is in truth to have laid aside the sad memory of all sorrows, and to have

found the abundance of all good and of all joy.

6. When St Bridget was praying for a certain hermit of especial and tried virtue, whose body had been brought into the church to be buried, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to her, and said: "O daughter, the soul of this hermit, my friend, would have gone immediately to heaven, if in death he had had a perfect desire of attaining to the presence and vision of God; because he had it not, it is now detained in the purgatory of desire, where there is no pain except the desire of attaining to God. Know, however, that it will be introduced into the glory of heaven before his body is laid in the earth."

7. On Easter Day St Gertrude prayed for the souls detained in purgatory, and immediately many were delivered by her prayers and translated to a place of very grateful refreshment; when she saw that they were not yet brought forth into full beatitude, she prayed again, and they were at once put in possession of everlasting bliss.

8. The soul of a certain young Count appeared after his death to St Mechtild. When she questioned him as to whether he suffered any pain, he answered that he felt no pain except that he did not see his most loving God, whom he longed to see with a

huge and unspeakable desire. For he said that the soul, while yet weighed down by the burden of the corruptible flesh, is greatly impeded by bodily necessities, by eating, sleeping, and conversing with men; but the pious soul that is released from the body, since it then becomes more aware that God is the supreme Good, burns with inconceivable desire of him. The most learned doctors assert that the vision of God being delayed is an exceeding grief and pain to a soul freed from the body, as the Scripture saith: *Hope that is deferred afflicteth the soul.** St Mechtild also heard the soul of the same Count chanting these words: "I know, O Lord, that thou hast delivered me over to death for my salvation, joy, and consolation." And she asking: "Who taught thee to chant those words?" the soul answered: "Those things I know which relate to the praise of my Creator."

9. The same virgin Mechtild was once carried in spirit into a most delightful garden near to heaven, where there was a great multitude of souls, who endured no other pain than that the worm of conscience was ever reproaching each one that he had not been faithful to his most sweet and gracious God, wherefore he had not deserved to attain

* Prov. xiii 12.

to him without impediment after death. And this worm departs not from the soul till it enters into the joy of its Lord. While St Mechtild was praying, these souls took their flight with great exultation to the glory of eternal bliss. And when the Lord afterwards showed to Mechtild the torments of purgatory, she again prayed, and many souls were translated with joy from those pains into that beautiful garden.

10. A certain virgin of St Gertrude's monastery having died after passing all her youth in practising the virtues of holy religion, Gertrude saw her standing by Jesus Christ in brilliant light, and with various adornments; yet she, with eyes cast down like a modest bride, strove to withdraw, not daring to lift her eyes to the glory of the divine Majesty. Wherefore Gertrude, incited by compassionate zeal, said to our Lord: "O most kind God, why receivest thou not this daughter to thy sweet embraces? Why dost thou permit her to stand by thee like a stranger?" At which words the Lord seemed with most gentle serenity to stretch forth his right hand, as though about to embrace the soul. But she with delicate reverence avoided it. Whereat Gertrude, greatly wondering, said to the soul: "Why dost thou withdraw from the embraces of so

lovable a Spouse?" And she answered: "Because I am not yet purified, and some stains make me still unworthy. Even if the entrance to heaven lay open to me, I would, following the dictates of justice, retire of my own will, while I know myself to be still unfit for so glorious a Spouse." Then Gertrude said: "And yet thou seemest already almost glorified." To which the soul replied: "No soul deserves to receive that glory of blessedness which the saints for their full reward obtain from the vision and fruition of the Godhead, until, being perfectly purged from every stain, it enters into the joy of its Lord."

11. When the sister of this virgin died in the monastery of St Gertrude (having also passed her life piously and religiously), Gertrude beheld in like manner her soul in a place of resplendent light, and wonderfully adorned; moreover, the Lord Jesus stood near her, and by his five wounds refreshed her senses with a new sweetness, and gently consoled her. Gertrude therefore said to the Lord: "How comes it that while thou, the God of all consolation, showest to this one thy loving serenity, she betrays by her sad countenance an interior affliction?" The Lord answered: "From this my presence the soul which thou seest receives only the

delights of my humanity, by which it cannot be fully consoled; but when it shall have been purified from the negligence of its past life, I will perfectly console it in the presence of my most blissful divinity." Then she said: "Wherefore, O my Lord, should thy mercy not at once avail to liberate from all the impediments of her negligences this thy daughter, to whom thou didst give, from her childhood, a pious heart and a nature full of kindness towards all men?" The Lord answered: "I will most abundantly reward the piety of her heart and her good will; but it is fitting, according to the dictates of my justice, that she should be first purified from every stain." And as it were caressingly touching the chin of the maiden, he added: "In this matter my bride most willingly consents to what my justice requires, since when she shall be fully purified, she will most happily enter into the glory of my divinity."

To these words of the Lord she assented with a sweet countenance. Afterwards, when St Gertrude offered for her during Mass the life-giving Host, which the priest was elevating, the soul said: "In truth I experience how certain it is that no good action of man, however trifling, is without reward, and that every fault, however small, must be expiated either before or after death.

For because I willingly received Holy Communion while I lived on earth, I now obtain great relief from the Sacrament of the Altar being offered for me. And because I had such good will towards all men, the prayers said for me avail me much more quickly. Moreover, I also look for the eternal recompense which I shall receive in heaven." And so the soul seemed to be borne on high, being raised up by the prayers of the Church. For she knew that when she had reached the appointed limit, the Lord would meet her with a crown of glory, and introduce her into eternal bliss. But although one who requires purgatory consents to the justice and will of God, he does not therefore love his pains; but he wishes to have so lived as that nothing in him should deserve to be punished or purified. Yet he would rather endure the pains of purgatory with the certainty of attaining to God, than be still in this life with the danger of sinning against God.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE JOYS OF PARADISE

1. The holy souls in heavenly glory are filled with wisdom by which they see all things in God.
2. The beauty of the angels and the holy souls and the deformity of the demons.
3. The countless number of the holy angels.
4. The blessed communicate to each other the peculiar good each enjoys. The desire to be reunited with their bodies does not detract from their bliss.
5. There is a scale of beauty and joy ascending from created things to the excelling beauty of God.
6. The exceeding splendour, majesty, and infinite lovableness of God.

1. After the death of a certain virgin St Gertrude saw her soul rejoicing in heavenly glory; and having heard her relate many most wonderful things, she said to her: "How knowest thou all these things? for whilst thou wert in the body, thy capacity was very simple." She answered: "I have learnt them from that Source, of which a certain saint says, that to have once beheld God is to have learnt all things." In like manner in the *Revelations of St Bridget*, the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and other citizens of heaven very frequently declare, that they see and know all things in God. Assuredly

the saints in heaven perfectly know the truth, they know the nature of all things, they see and know whatever belongs to the order and beauty of the whole world. Hence St Gregory saith: "Since the blessed souls in heaven see within the brightness of God, it is in nowise to be believed that there is anything without of which they are ignorant."

In the twenty-eighth chapter of the fourth Book of the *Insinuations of Divine Piety, or Revelations of St Gertrude*, we find that St Gertrude saw herself presented before God, clothed in a garment on which was distinctly marked everything that she had thought, said or done in religion, whether good or bad, so that not even the smallest point of her good or evil thoughts, intentions, words or works could be hidden, since God and all the dwellers in heaven know them most perfectly in the light of infallible truth. Whence she learned from God, that the state of every man lies open in like manner to God, and to the saints throughout endless ages. Therefore every blessed spirit, seeing the essence of God, sees and knows all things which concern the perfection of his own glory, sees and knows whatsoever he desires to see and know; but he sees not all things, which exist and shine in God. For if the creature could know all that is in God, he would comprehend God,

which is by no means possible, since the creature is finite, and God is infinite. Wherefore not even the most blessed of all creatures —that is to say, the Soul of Christ—comprehends the divinity, or the infinite essence of God.* The uncreated God alone fully comprehends and knows himself. He, however, who in heaven is highest in merit, and most ardently loved God, beholds him most clearly, and understands most in him. There each one in his measure partakes of the glory of God, which is common to all, and each one is filled.

2. Christ said to St Bridget: "If when visions are shown to thee, thou wert to see the beauty of the blessed souls or of the holy angels as it is, thy heart would be broken with excess of joy. If again thou wert to see the devil as he is, thou couldst not endure so horrible a sight and live. But thou discernest spiritual things as if they were corporeal, and the souls and angels appear to thee in the likeness of men; because thy spirit, being as yet impeded by the flesh, cannot otherwise take them in."

Wherefore our Lord said to St Catherine: "Thou well rememberest, that when once I had shown thee in ecstasy the devil in his own shape, as it were at a glance and for a moment,

* *Cf.* St Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 3ª Pars, Q. x, 1.

thou being restored to thy bodily senses, didst choose rather to walk with naked feet upon a burning path till the day of judgement than to behold him again. And yet thou knowest not how horrible he really is, whom thou didst see so imperfectly. But so great is the loveliness of even the lowest citizen of heaven, that the sensible beauty of the whole world put together can in nowise be compared to it; its brightness far surpasses the noonday brilliance of the visible sun."

3. In the eleventh chapter of the fourth book of the *Revelations of St Bridget*, the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, tells St Bridget that the number of the blessed angelic spirits is so great, that if all men were counted from Adam to the last who will be born at the end of the world, ten glorious angels at least might be assigned to each man. The divine Dionysius the Areopagite also writes, that the number of the holy angels exceeds all numbers of inferior creations. Several of the Fathers, however, think that there are not more angels in heaven than there will be souls of men saved at the end of the world; so that the numbers of angels and saints will be equal.

4. O how joyful will it be to behold all that heavenly host, and that ravishing multitude, resplendent in gracious humility, most sweet charity, ineffable beauty and perpetual glory,

and most perfectly to know each one of the citizens of heaven !

God said to St Catherine: " I have provided and arranged much concerning the love of the heavenly citizens, and the angelic spirits in eternal life. For I would not that each should enjoy alone his own good, which he receives from me, but I have ordained that the good of each one be shared by all. I have willed that in most orderly and perfect charity the greater should enjoy the good of the lesser, and the lesser likewise should partake of the joy of the greater. There, both great and small obtain perfect happiness and perfect consolation, because all are filled according to their measure and degree. O how fraternal and how united to me is that charity ! The angels with immense gladness communicate with the blessed spirits, and the blessed spirits with the holy angels. Therefore all, being abundantly imbued with sweetest charity, exult beyond what thou canst understand, and in a wonderful manner rejoice in me with jubilation. Every citizen of heaven beholding me, the eternal God, beholds the glory and praise of my name in my saints, and in the good angelic spirits, and in all other creatures, and even in the demons. He clearly perceives the truth, and possesses all

things that he can desire. He is ever satiated, yet never glutted or cloyed. Although he discerns the offences of sinners, yet he can in nowise feel grief from this or any other cause, but he feels compassion without pain, loving the sinners themselves, and ever with affectionate charity beseeching me graciously to show mercy unto the world. The will of the blessed is utterly united and conformed to my will. Hence though parents should see their children lost in hell, they are yet not moved by any compassion towards them, but are well content, seeing them tormented as my enemies. The blessed desire indeed to be reunited to their bodies, but this desire afflicts them not, since they most certainly know that it will at some time be fulfilled. Nor must thou imagine that after the resurrection the glorification of the body will bring greater happiness to the soul; for if it were so, the bliss of the souls which are in heaven would be imperfect until they had resumed their bodies, which is by no means possible; for no perfection is wanting to them. The body will not add to the bliss of the soul, but rather the soul will out of its abundance give bliss to the body. The eye of the intellect sufficeth not to see, nor the ear to hear, nor the tongue to express, nor the thoughts of the heart to understand, how

great is the bliss of my elect.* O what and how great is the bliss of beholding me clearly, of sweetly embracing me, of for ever enjoying me, who am the Supreme and Eternal Good !"

5. A certain virgin who was often admitted to the utmost familiarity with God, used, while her soul was elevated in God, to utter only these words: " O my God and my all !" For in God are all things, and God is all. All things were from eternity in the mind of God; since in him the ideas and forms of all things immutably existed, and the divine Essence itself is the pattern and idea of all things which have been and are to be created. For whatsoever God creates, whatsoever he has done or will do, has been from all eternity known by him, and remains for ever in his unchangeable knowledge, and shines forth in him. Oh, how greatly is God to be loved and desired ! He is himself light, beauty, peace, sweetness, graciousness, and goodness, immense, unchangeable and eternal.

We wonder at the splendour of the sun, the brightness of the moon and stars, the adornment of the heavens, the order of the elements, the multiplicity of animals, the variety of colours, the fresh joy of gardens, the beauty of flowers, the verdure of the grass and leaves, the brilliancy of gold, the

* *Cf.* 1 Cor. ii 9.

lustre of gems, the harmony of nature, the fairness of the human form and face; but if we were to behold the unspeakable beauty of invisible creatures, namely, of the heavenly spirits and blessed souls, our senses would fail us with wonder and admiration. How much ought we not then to admire and love the incomprehensible beauty of God? For the beauties of created things are nothing else but minute rivulets flowing from that supreme Beauty, as from their original source. We are in admiration of the song of birds, and the sweet sounds of lyre, harp, and organ; we wonder at the sweetness and fragrance which God has given to honey, to wine, to fruits, flowers, herbs, and spices; but God, from whom all sweetness flows, is incomparably and infinitely more sweet and delightful. Melody, fragrance, and sweetness are in God in a manner that is indescribable, superessential, most true and most perfect. Whatever sweetness, beauty, excellence, attraction, or perfection we find in a partial and limited measure in creatures, exists collectively, simply, and with infinite plenitude in God. The visible light and brightness of the sun is darkness and obscurity compared to the divine light. Hence the blessed John says in the Apocalypse, that the heavenly city has no need of the sun, because

it is enlightened by the most splendid, serene and blissful glory of God;* and in it there is one everlasting day, to which no night succeeds.

All fairness of created things may indeed be called ugliness, compared with the uncreated beauty. So also the sweetness of creatures is as it were bitterness, compared with the sweetness of the Creator. In like manner all the riches, nobility, glory, majesty, excellence, dignity, and perfection of this world are nothing in comparison with the riches, nobility, glory, majesty, excellence, dignity, and perfection of God. And all the joys and delights which can be felt in this world, compared to the most pure joys and everlasting delights which are derived in heaven from the vision of God and the fellowship of the saints, are like a little drop of water compared to the whole ocean.

Let us therefore desire our God, who alone can fully satisfy us; let us love that supreme and unchangeable Good, in whom is all good; let us sigh after that blissful and eternal life, compared to which the present life should rather be called death. Alas! how imperfectly, how weakly, with what dark and distracted minds do we here praise God

* *Cf.* Apoc. xxi 23.

but there is praise perfect and everlasting where love is ardent, sweet, and constant.

6. The most favoured virgin, St Gertrude, once understood in spirit, that the light of the Divinity was so great and so incomprehensible, that if each one of the saints, from Adam to the last man, were to attain as deep and clear a knowledge of it as anyone has ever attained, without that knowledge being shared by any other, and even if the multitude of the saints were a thousand times more numerous, yet that light of the Divinity would infinitely surpass all understanding. The same is true of the beauty, sweetness, and goodness of God, and of his other desirable perfections.

With good reason therefore did this virgin, Gertrude, who, in her union with God, had tasted the delights of the heavenly country, thus exclaim, and commit to writing these words: "O blessed region, making blessed with the affluence of bliss; harvest of delights, whose minutest grain is able fully to satisfy the desires of all the elect, containing all things desirable, attractive, and sweet that the human heart can conceive! O eternal solstice, fair noontide, secure abode, dwelling filled with every pleasure, joyful paradise, flowing on all sides with rivers of inestimable delights, fascinating by the varied beauty of

its flowery gardens, and soothing with most sweet sounds, yea, with the entrancing melody of intellectual music, and inebriating with the overwhelming sweetness of interior joys, and transforming by the marvellous charm of secret embraces! But wherefore should my stammering tongue attempt to speak of it? when even if all the powers of angels and men were combined in one science, it would never fully suffice to form one single word which could in any measure express, or reach to the height of its excellence." These are the words of St Gertrude. But if such inexplicable things were shown to that virgin during her exile, what, I ask, is given to the blessed citizens of heaven, who see God not *in a dark manner, but face to face?** May Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God and of the Virgin, who is blessed for evermore, deign to bring us into that heavenly home. Amen.

* 1 Cor. xiii 12.

APPENDIX

OF THE FOUR HOLY WOMEN FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IN THE FOREGOING BOOK

I.—*Of St Bridget*

THE blessed Bridget was born of noble parents, who descended from the kings of Sweden. Our Lord began to visit her even in her earliest childhood; and at the age of thirteen, although she especially loved virginity, yet by the command of her parents, and by the will of God, she married a most noble youth, by name Ulpho, and had by him four sons and as many daughters.

Her husband being at length dead, she chose with Mary Magdalen the best part,* and at the command of God left her native country and came to Rome. Afterwards, by the command of the Lord, she went to Jerusalem, and subsequently returned to Rome.

After her husband's death Christ said to this most holy woman: "I am thy God, who will to converse with thee. But I speak to thee not for thyself alone, but for the good of all Christians. Thou shalt be my bride, and I will make use of thee as a channel;

* *Cf.* Luke x 42.

because by thy means I will communicate my grace to others, and will do good to them. Thou shalt see and hear spiritual and heavenly secrets, and my spirit shall remain with thee till death. Thou becamest mine by right, when at the death of thy husband thou didst resign thy will into my hands and wast prepared to relinquish all things for me. Therefore I take thee to myself to be my spouse, that I may find such delight in thee as it is fitting that God should find in a chaste soul."

Again the Lord said to her: "Many wonder wherefore I converse with thee rather than with others who are better and more perfect than thou, and have served me longer than thou hast. But I answer them that I am like the master of a house, having various kinds of wine in his house, who sometimes drinks that which is inferior, because he then prefers it, rejecting the stronger; yet he does not therefore despise or throw away the better wine, but reserves it for his future use. I have indeed many friends, whose lives are sweeter to me than honey and brighter than the sun; and yet I have chosen thee to be my bride, that I might reveal to thee my secrets, not because thou art better than they or even couldst be compared to them, but because I have so willed,

who make the foolish to be wise, and sinners to be just. In conferring on thee such grace, I reject them not, but shall make use of them afterwards to my honour. Therefore do thou ever humble thyself."

A certain exceedingly holy monk, by name Gerekinus, once saw St Bridget raised from the ground into the air, and a river flowing out of her mouth, and heard a voice uttering these words: "This woman, coming from the ends of the earth, shall pour forth wisdom upon innumerable nations. And this shall be a sign to thee, that she, being taught by God, shall foretell the end of thy life; wherefore thou shalt exult in her words, and the desire with which thou longest for the vision of God shall quickly be fulfilled."

This widow, so dear to God, speaking of the grace given her, said to the Lord: "When it pleaseth thee, O Lord, thou dost still my body, not indeed with bodily sleep, but with a certain spiritual quiet; but thou dost then rouse my soul as it were out of sleep, and makest it spiritually to see, hear, and feel." For when the same St Bridget was rapt in ecstasy, all the powers of her body seemed to fail, but her heart exulted and was inflamed with love. She passed happily out of this life in the seventieth year of her age.*

* A.D. 1373.

2.—*Of St Catherine of Siena*

The virgin of Christ, Catherine, an Italian by nation and born in the city of Siena, loved God fervently, and served him zealously from her earliest years. When she was yet a little child, and had been taught the Hail Mary, she was accustomed to salute the Mother of the Lord at each of the steps by which she entered her father's house. She was devoted to prayer and most familiar with God.

Our Lord also interiorly invited and attracted her to adopt a supernatural austerity of life. For she chastised with the utmost severity her tender virginal body. She sometimes remained without food from Ash Wednesday to the Ascension, satisfied with the reception of the holy Eucharist alone. For several years she took nothing for the refreshment of her body but a little juice of herbs; and she became seriously and dangerously ill if she was constrained to take anything else. She seldom slept more than two hours, lying on a very hard bed, which she had made for herself of planks of wood.

The Lord, however, taught her that true holiness consists not in these arduous works of penance and bodily exercises, but in the mortification of self-will and of evil dis-

positions; and that he would greatly err, who should measure perfection rather by great severity of life than by true humility and love.

Although her manner of life was singular, it is not to be reproved, since she adopted and pursued it by the impulse and by the will and special assistance of the Holy Ghost. Thus we see by what different paths the elect of God are outwardly led. For St Bridget refreshed her body discreetly and moderately with food and sleep, as nature required. So we think did the holy virgins Mechtild and Gertrude; and we do not read of them that they embraced any unusual austerity of life, for they were often prevented by weakness from keeping their rule in its severity. But St Catherine led a life of unheard-of abstinence and austerity, and she is in this respect rather to be admired than imitated.

She ever approached with the utmost alacrity the Sacrament of the Altar (which she received almost daily), as if she had been invited to heavenly nuptials. She overcame divers temptations of the evil spirits with the shield of patience and the helmet of faith. She suffered frequently from pains in her head, and almost continually from a severe pain in her side.

She was filled with such abundance of grace, and was so firmly united to God, that

her mind seemed to be almost incessantly occupied in divine contemplation. She was very often taken out of her bodily senses and fell into ecstasy by the operation of God, and then her whole body became rigid. In these ecstasies she often perceived things so sublime, that, returning to her senses, she could in no way find words fitly to explain what she understood by divine enlightenment. Wherefore she repeated again and again these words only: "I have seen the hidden things of God."

Thirsting for the salvation of souls, she gave precepts of salvation to men in the various places to which she travelled, and by the grace of God worked many miracles. She died in the thirty-third year of her life, and was received into heaven.*

3.—*Of St Mechtild*

The holy virgin Mechtild, the daughter of a certain Count, was born in Germany. Being taken in the seventh year of her age by her mother to a neighbouring monastery of virgins of the Order of St Benedict, she remained there, and at length made her religious profession.

She grew rapidly in the love of God, and in true virtue, and became most familiar with the Lord. For she had entirely re-

* A.D. 1380.

nounced her own will, humbly preferring all others to herself, and was most prompt in obedience. She was never found idle, but was always either praying or meditating, teaching or reading, or working with her hands, to the honour of God.

She was often tormented by a painful disease, and other sufferings; but she bore most patiently all the afflictions that came upon her, receiving them with a joyful heart from the hand of the Lord. Many days she suffered from so severe a pain in the head, that she was quite unable to sleep, and she was then also deprived of her usual divine sweetness and consolation. But when she complained with tears to our Lord, and humbly called upon him, the merciful Lord, who is ever present with those in tribulation, at length poured upon her such abundance of grace, that she remained a long time with her eyes closed, as if dead, in the enjoyment of God, perceiving meanwhile many heavenly secrets. She often fell into ecstasies of this sort, and was wholly rapt in God.

She experienced such sweetness, when she read or heard the words of the Gospel—for she had learnt, and understood the Latin tongue—that she often became nearly insensible from the overwhelming delight.

On one Wednesday after Easter, when

this Introit of the Mass was begun, *Come, ye blessed of my Father,* she being filled with immense and unusual joy, said to our Lord: "O that I were one of those blessed ones, who shall hear these most sweet words of thine!" And the Lord replied: "Know for certain that thou art one of them. And that thou mayest have no doubt of it, behold I give thee my Heart as a pledge of love, and for a house of refuge, that thou mayest always, and chiefly in the hour of thy death, find in it consolation and repose." From that time she began to have a wonderful devotion to the Heart of Jesus Christ, whence she frequently said in her simplicity: "If all the good things were to be written down which I have received from the most gracious Heart of my Lord, the largest possible volume could not contain them."

In her last illness, when her companion, the blessed Gertrude, enquired of the Lord what he was working in her, the Lord answered: "I repose with her in a sweet embrace, because although she be tortured by various and continual pains, yet trusting in my goodness, she believes that through my divine mercy all things are for her eternal salvation, and ever giving thanks to me, she faithfully commits herself to my fatherly providence."

One day the same spouse of Christ, Mech-

tild, being already in the agony of death, said nothing but these words: "O good Jesus, O good Jesus," which she constantly repeated; thus plainly showing that he was in truth intimately impressed on her heart, whose name she so sweetly pondered, and so frequently pronounced, amid the bitter pains of death. But the hour being come when she was to pass out of this world, Jesus, the Lord of Supreme Majesty, glorifying her with the light of his divinity, in a sweet and gentle voice invited her in these words: *Come, thou blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for thee, from the foundation of the world.**

Then indeed did the Lord himself remind her of that most excellent gift, by which some years before (when the same words were sung in the Mass) he had given her his Heart as a pledge of love. Therefore that blessed soul, being admitted into the sweetest Heart of Jesus, entered happily into eternal glory and heavenly joys.

4.—*Of St Gertrude*

The virgin Gertrude, or Trutha, full of the loving sweetness of God's grace, shone with the splendour of all virtues, having been,

* Matt. xxv. 24.

in the fifth year of her age, planted like a fair lily in the garden of holy religion. She served God in the same monastery as Mechtild.

Gertrude, being gifted with extraordinary talents, in a short time made great progress in the Latin language; but her chief study was to acquire humility and purity of heart, and to be united to God by ardent love.

She saw herself, in the light of truth, to be unworthy of any of the gifts of God; she looked upon herself, I say, only as a sort of channel by which God willed to convey his gifts to his elect. She esteemed above herself all whom she saw; and those to whom she communicated the gifts of God, she believed to merit more by their thoughts, their innocence or blameless conversation, than she could by all her exercises and labours.

Sometimes, when she was journeying, she said to our Lord in her deep abjection: "Ah! my Lord! among the great miracles which thou workest, I consider this to be one of the chiefest, that thou permittest the earth to bear so vile a sinner as I am." To which the Lord graciously answered: "Rightly does the earth allow itself to be trodden by thee, since all the dignity of heaven awaits with ineffable desire that most joyful hour, when it may receive and welcome thee."

When garments or any other things were

offered to her that she might choose which she liked, she would not choose, but stretching forth her hand with her eyes shut, she received with the utmost gratitude whatever she took hold of, though it might be the most vile, as if the Lord had given it to her with his own hands.

Her confidence in God was ever firm, her mind active and courageous, leaning steadily on his fatherly providence, to which she looked in all things.

The Lord sensibly imprinted on her heart the glorious stigmata of his five wounds, and he prepared for himself in her so pleasing a dwelling, and so sweetly manifested to her his Heart, that if men did not know the power and goodness of the Lord to be boundless, they could hardly believe that he had shown as much familiar friendship to his most holy Mother on the earth as he showed to her.

Hence the same Lord Jesus, speaking to a certain holy person of her while she was yet alive, said thus: "Since there is no one now living who is nearer and more united to me by pure intention, good will, and true fidelity than she is, I also incline to no soul dwelling in the flesh with greater favour than to her soul; wherefore thou mayest nowhere more readily find me than in the Sacrament of the Altar, and next in the heart and soul of this

my spouse." Again the Lord said to another person: "I am all hers, and I have united her inseparably to me by love, as gold and silver are melted by fire into one metal." And again: "She is to all the citizens of heaven a sweet-sounding harmony, which is produced by all the adversities endured by her with so much equanimity." To Mechtild also, who was praying for her, the Lord said: "Whosoever shall listen to her words, and humbly obey her admonitions, shall not deviate from the way of salvation, but shall at length attain to eternal life." And to Gertrude herself he said: "Since I have mercifully chosen thee, that I may joyfully dwell in thee, whosoever shall commend himself to thy prayers, with pious confidence, shall by my grace be saved." And again: "No one of those who listen to thy words with humility, and order their lives according to them with a pious intention, can ever perish, but will attain to me by a way safe from all error."

She had also received from the divine and infallible Truth the promise, that as in the death of Christ the most exalted power of love separated the Soul of the Lord Jesus himsel from the Body, so in the death of this virgin divine love was to consume all her strength.

She was, moreover, assured by a divine

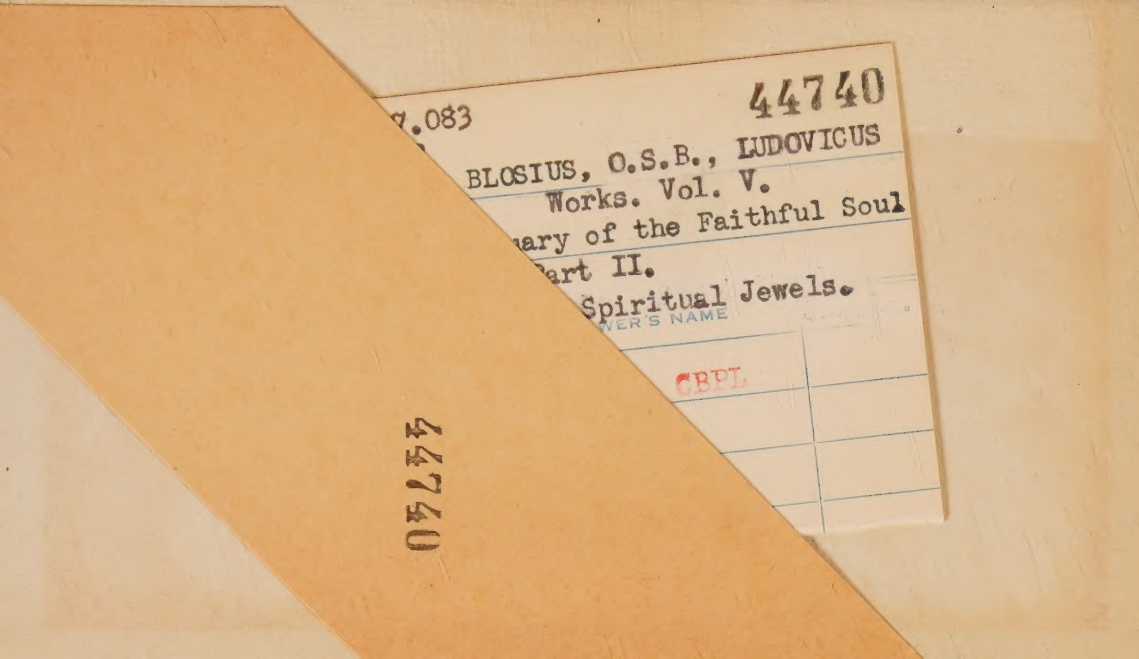
promise that if anyone should, either before or after her death, considering and understanding how graciously and familiarly God had condescended to her, devoutly, faithfully, and lovingly praise God, or give thanks to him, for the benefits bestowed on her, he should not depart out of this world until God had taken delight in some especial familiarity with his soul. Therefore he who chooses may pray in this or like manner: " O sweetest Lord Jesus Christ, I praise thee and give thee thanks, with all the devotion of which I am capable, for all the benefits thou didst bestow on the virgin Gertrude, thy beloved spouse; and by that love with which thou didst from eternity choose her out for thy special favour, and in thy own good time didst sweetly attract her and familiarly invite her to thyself, and joyfully abide in her soul, and end the course of her life by a blessed death, I pray and beseech thee that thou wilt have mercy on me, and render me pleasing to thee, and lead me into eternal life. Amen."

5.—*On the authority of the foregoing Revelations*

The revelations made to the holy women mentioned above were known to the whole world, and have long ago been approved by

pious and learned men; for the holy Fathers everywhere quote them in their books and writings. During the lifetime of St Bridget, distinguished bishops and theologians examined her revelations; and after her death the Council of Basle deputed some who were eminent for piety and learning to investigate them again most carefully; and all these constantly affirmed that they came from God. In like manner the revelations of St Gertrude were, both before and after her death, examined with the utmost care by most enlightened men; one of whom, after an accurate study of them, wrote his opinion as follows: "In the light of divine truth I am convinced that no one who is illuminated by the Spirit of God can calumniate or attack those things which are contained in this book, for they are Catholic and holy."

From all which it appears how far from the Spirit of God are those who reject and ridicule these revelations as the dreams of foolish women. May God forgive them; and may he deign, through the merits and intercession of his most dear spouses—on whom he abundantly poured forth his Spirit, and whom he surpassingly illuminated with the light of truth—to bring us all, after this miserable life, to eternal blessedness in the life to come.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